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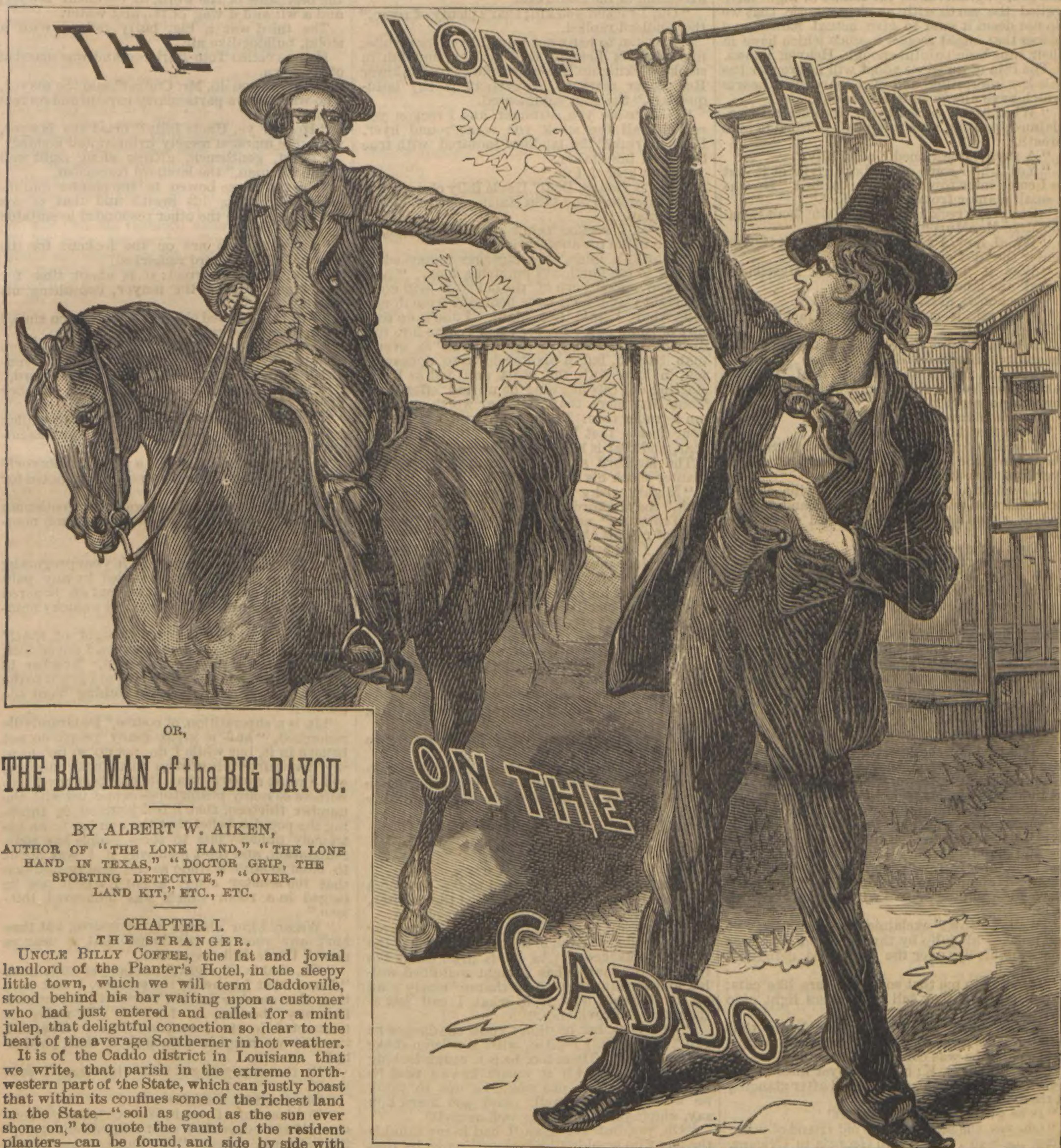
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OR, THE BAD MAN of the BIG BAYOU.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "THE LONE HAND," "THE LONE
HAND IN TEXAS," "DOCTOR GRIP, THE
SPORTING DETECTIVE," "OVER-
LAND KIT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGER.

UNCLE BILLY COFFEE, the fat and jovial landlord of the Planter's Hotel, in the sleepy little town, which we will term Caddoville, stood behind his bar waiting upon a customer who had just entered and called for a mint julep, that delightful concoction so dear to the heart of the average Southerner in hot weather.

It is of the Caddo district in Louisiana that we write, that parish in the extreme north-western part of the State, which can justly boast that within its confines some of the richest land in the State—"soil as good as the sun ever shone on," to quote the vaunt of the resident planters—can be found, and side by side with these fertile fields, which only needed to be tickled with a hoe to smile a most abundant

THE TRUE LONE HAND SMILED AS HE REPLIED: "WHY, YOU ARE L. HAND, THE
CELEBRATED SECRET SERVICE DETECTIVE."

harvest are dark and dense swamps which afford refuge to the boar, the wild-cat, and human beasts, outcasts and outlaws, fully as ferocious as the animals whose home they share.

The Caddo district being near the junction of three States offers strong advantages to the men who have been unfortunate enough to bring down upon their heads the weight of the law.

If the Louisiana officials are hot on the scent, the fugitive by crossing the line into Arkansas is safe from pursuit, and if the man has been unlucky enough to have the Arkansas bloodhounds after him, a few miles carries him into Texas.

And the fellow must be a great criminal indeed, and the officers unusually sharp, for the officers of the law of the three States to get on the track at the same time.

Owing to these peculiar circumstances then, Caddo parish can not only boast of her rich planters and high-minded gentlemen, but is also notorious for the men who have fled from the vengeance of an outraged law, although if you were to suggest such a thing to the average Caddoite he would probably deny that such was the case with considerable indignation.

And it is in deference to this feeling that we call the town of which we are about to write, Caddoville; that is not its true name, but it is near enough for any one acquainted with the country to guess the right appellation of the place.

We have so strange a story to tell—of men and women who still live—of dark deeds, the stories of which are told with bated breath when the gossips gather after the shades of night have veiled the earth with an ebon mantle, that we do not deem it wise to give actual names and places that might reopen wounds which have in their time been painful enough, Heaven knows.

The thin disguise we adopt will not render the tale less interesting, and may spare some hearts which have already suffered enough.

"What is this yarn I hear?" the customer exclaimed, pausing with julep half-finished to take breath.

"A yarn?" questioned Uncle Billy.

"Yes, I hear some of the boys givin' of it out as I come inter town," the man replied. He was a small planter from up the "Red."

"Oh, yes, I reckon you are talkin' 'bout Senator Mike MacMurphy?"

"Wa-al, now, I reckon I am! You hit it plum center the fu'st crack."

"Was it 'bout his buying the Hazelhurst place?" the landlord inquired.

"I reckon it were."

"Well, sah, it is a sure enough fact!" Uncle Billy declared.

The landlord was Georgian and dropped into the dialect once in awhile.

"I reckon that is the biggest deal that has taken place 'round these diggin's since the war," the other observed.

"I reckon you are right, thar."

"Bout five thousand acres."

"Yes, it is called that, but men who know all about the place allow that there is quite a piece over five thousand acres."

"I heerd that the senator is a gwine to give ten dollars an acre for it—fifty thousand dollars, and is gwine to pay the cash all down in a lump."

"That is the programme."

"A mighty big heap of money."

"You bet it is, but the senator has got it!" the landlord declared. "They say that when he come out of the wah he was as poor as a church mouse; he owned a plantation upon the Mississippi and a hundred or two of likely niggers when the trouble commenced, but arter it ended, the niggers were gone and all that was left of the plantation was the s'ile, horses, fences, stock wasn't thar, and to add to his ill-luck the river had made a sudden turn and cut off 'bout half of his land."

"Hard lines!"

"You bet! but the senator is one of the cusses who never know when they are whipped, so he jest piled right into work. He is a git up and git man. It was his reckonin' that thar wasn't any money for him in plantin' no more, so he let the place go for what he could git, and went to clerking it in Orleans. Then he got to speculating and made some big strikes: went into politics and then into railroads, and now the folk who know all about him reckon he kin draw his check for a million or two without straining his back."

"Well, I swow!" exclaimed the customer, who had finished his julip by this time and who was smacking his lips over the last of the delightful compound.

"It 'pears to me that some men are like cats; no matter how they fall they allers light onto their feet."

"Wa-al, now, you kin bet yer boots that Senator Mike is one of that kind every time!"

"I heered he was coming by the stage."

"Yes, that is O. K.; he'll be hyer inside of an hour now," the landlord remarked after glancing at the clock.

"Is he gwine to stop with you?"

"Oh, yes, the senator is an old friend of mine. After the wah I came from Georgia to Orleans,

and stopped thar for a while 'fore I came up in to this country, and while I was in Orleans I boarded in the same house with MacMurphy. It war mighty hard scratching for the senator 'bout that time, and I reckon thar war many a day when he didn't have two dollars in his pocket for to rub together."

"Like as not?"

"The deal is a-gwine to take place right in this house. Felix de Grandville, our mayor, and Judge Ly Waldron are the men who ingineered the trade, and the best room in the house, No. 13, has been engaged."

At this point a man who had been lounging in the doorway, listening to the conversation, unnoticed by either the landlord or the planter, came slowly up to the bar.

He was a little above the medium size, rather burly in his appearance and plainly dressed, looking like a stockman.

He was not a prepossessing-looking man, for he had a red face, surmounted by a bushy shock of black hair, extremely heavy eyebrows, and his chin and upper lip were covered with a bristle-like growth of black hairs showing that the man had not felt the touch of a razor on his chin for a couple of weeks.

"How'd ye? Kin I get to stay with you a while?" the man asked as he came up to the bar.

The pair surveyed the man with considerable curiosity for strangers were not common in Caddoville.

Although the man's appearance was not in his favor, yet as the two set him down for a cattle-man they thought nothing of it.

Rough-looking strangers are the rule not the exception in the Southwest.

"Oh, I reckon you kin; thar's plenty of room," the landlord replied.

"I reckon to hang out 'round hyer for awhile; my name is Beasley, Gid Beasley, and I'm in stock—picking up hosses and mules for the lower Red River market. Shreveport is my headquarters," the man volunteered.

"Glad to see you, stranger, and I reckon you will find all the stock you want 'round hyer. Have a drink?" the landlord inquired with true Southern hospitality.

"Don't keer if I do."

"You'll j'ine us, Ben?" Uncle Billy observed to the planter who had been staring open-mouthed at the man.

"Wa-al, I reckon 'tain't polite to refuse, so you kin make me another julep."

"Whisky's mine," the stranger remarked in answer to the landlord's inquiring look. "And I reckon a good horn of the old stuff will go to the right place, for I have hoofed it from Jonesville whare I staid last night. I don't do that sort of thing as a rule, for when I came into this district I war riding as good a mar' as ever a man backed, but a planter down to Jonesville fell in love with the beast, and jest as I war starting out this morning he up and offered me 'bout fifty more than she war worth, and as I am a trader from Tradersville you kin bet all your ducats that I closed with him then and thar, and that is how I came to hoof it."

The landlord shook his head, and the small planter shook his head.

"Mighty risky if you are well heeled with cash," the landlord remarked.

"That's so," added the planter. "Thar's a heap of rascals about."

"Oh, I am well-armed and I reckon I would make mince-meat out of anybody who should attempt to go for me."

"Wa-al, it may be that you could, but that's a cuss who has been cutting up didoes 'round hyer who don't give the men he goes for much chance," the landlord replied.

"Wa-al, I wasn't posted, of course, but as I come through all right, thar's been no harm done. Hyer's to you!"

The drinks were dispatched, and Uncle Billy conducted the stranger up-stairs so he could pick out a room.

He looked at several and finally settled on No. 12.

"This hyer will do, and as I'm kinder tuckered, I will take a snooze; you needn't call me for supper, for I jest had a bite and ain't hungry."

"All right," and the landlord retired.

CHAPTER II.

THE UNLUCKY NUMBER.

WHEN the landlord returned to the bar-room he found the planter leaning on the counter, rubbing his chin in a meditative sort of way.

"I have jest been a-thinking 'bout this hyer man a-hoofing it from Jonesville up hyer," the planter remarked. "As he is arter stock the odds are big that he has a right well-filled wallet, and for him to come up that ar' lonely road all by himself, why, it is what I call jest a tempting of Providence."

"That is so, but he didn't know the danger he ran," Uncle Billy replied, with a solemn shake of the head. "Then, too, he is a rough-looking kind of a cuss, and if it wasn't known that he was a stockman, no one would be apt to think he would pan out well. And you heerd him say, didn't ye, that he was well-armed?"

"Oh, yes, but the man I had in my mind is the one who wouldn't be bothered much by that

if he took it into his head to go for this hyer drover, 'cos, if you remember, this particular customer don't seem to keer much for pistols, nohow."

"That's so, but as he got through all right, it don't matter."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance into the saloon of three gentlemen, and as each man will play a prominent part in our tale we will describe them.

Three leading citizens of the town were they.

The first was a tall, thin man, whose long face, high cheek-bones, pointed mustache and imperial, with his jet-black hair, gave him a striking resemblance to the last Napoleon, Louis, whose star set at Sedan.

This was the Mayor of Caddoville, Felix de Grandville.

As could be guessed from his name, as well as from his personal appearance, he was of French descent, being a member of one of the old Creole families.

The second was a short, fat, middle-aged man, with a jolly, good-natured face, but the most remarkable thing about him was the fact that "he had no wool on the top of his head, the place where the wool ought to grow," as the old negro song says.

In fact, he could only boast of a thin fringe of hair around his neck, but he made up for this by wearing an enormous chin piece, which more nearly resembled the beard of an old billy-goat, than anything else.

This was Judge Lysander Waldron, usually term Ly Waldron, one of the leading men of the district; a fine, hearty Southern gentleman in the best sense of the word, an excellent lawyer, and a wit and a wag of the first water.

The third was a big, burly fellow, with a solid, bulldog-like air.

He was called Tom Burleron and was marshal of the town.

"How do you do, Mr. Coffee?" said the mayor, who was always particularly careful and correct in his speech.

"How d' ye, Uncle Billy?" cried the lawyer, while the marshal merely grinned and nodded.

"Peart, gentlemen, gitting along right well for an old man," the landlord responded.

Then the three bowed to the planter and inquired regarding his health and that of his family, to which the other responded in suitable terms.

"I reckon you are on the lookout for the senator," the landlord remarked.

"Yes, you are correct; it is about time for the stage," replied the mayor, consulting his watch.

"But that durned old hearse is never on time," the marshal observed.

"Oh, it has been doing pretty well," the judge declared. "By the way, have you got the senator's room all ready?" he asked of the landlord.

"Oh, yes, the best room in the house, Number 13."

"Oh!" exclaimed the mayor in such a peculiar manner that the attention of the rest was immediately attracted.

"What is the matter—got a pain, Mr. Mayor?" asked Uncle Billy, who had never been noted for his quick wits.

"Oh, no, no pain, but—" and the gentleman hesitated and shook his head in a solemn manner.

The judge laughed.

"Uncle Billy, you are wrong in your prognosis; our worthy mayor is not troubled by any pain but by the fact that you have put an honored guest into a room which bears the unlucky number thirteen."

"Wa-al, I swow! I never thought of that!" the landlord exclaimed, "but then I never took no stock in anything of that kind. Number 13 is the best room in the house and so I giv'n it to the senator, but I never thought nothing 'bout the number."

"It is a superstition, of course," De Grandville remarked, "and a great many people do not believe in it, but while I do not go so far as to say that thirteen is *always* an unlucky number, yet I must remark that it has been my lot to witness so many misfortunes connected with the number thirteen, that I feel justified in thinking the popular belief that the number is an extremely unlucky one to some people has some foundation, and most assuredly if I was about to close so large a trade as this land transaction that the senator comes about I would not be lodged in a room which was numbered thirteen."

"Wa-al, I kin change it of course, but that ain't any room in the house that is near as good," Uncle Billy remarked.

"Oh, that is all right!" the lawyer exclaimed. "From what I know of the senator, I feel sure that the number of the room will not trouble him any; besides, no business will really be transacted in the room, but in my office, and there is no number attached to that, good or bad."

"By the way, you got that wine that I sent you?"

"Oh, yes, it's on the ice now."

"The last time I was in New Orleans the senator did the honors in a most magnificent style," the judge exclaimed. "My money wasn't good

for anything while I was in the town, so I made up my mind when I heard that MacMurphy was coming up here, to show him that we men of Caddo know how to entertain visitors, so I sent to Orleans for a basket of champagne of the particular brand that the senator most favors, and mine host here has it in readiness for him.

"By the way, mayor, you are well posted—what was that remark made by the Governor of North Carolina to the Governor of South Carolina, about it being a long time?"

"Between drinks!" roared the marshal, perceiving that the Creole was puzzling over the matter.

The mayor had never been known to make a joke in his life, and seldom appreciated one.

"Exactly, a long time between drinks—one of the most sensible messages that a governor ever delivered."

"Suppose, Uncle Billy, you produce a bottle of that wine, and we will test the truth of the old adage that good wine is no poison."

The wine was brought, duly enjoyed, and just as the party finished the bottle the stage from Jonesville arrived.

It brought two passengers, one of whom was the man who was expected, the Honorable Michael MacMurphy, and the other a gentleman equally well-known, but whose appearance was a surprise, Philip Van Orden, the German-American banker of Jonesville.

From the name, Michael MacMurphy, one would expect to see a man whose appearance betrayed a Celtic origin, but there was nothing of the kind about the senator.

He was a portly, red-faced, red-whiskered man, looking more like a jolly, well-fed, beef-eating Englishman than anything else.

The banker was also a portly man, with light hair and beard, with a decidedly Jewish cast to his features.

Both were Southern born, and though of foreign descent felt that they were as native to the soil as any man in the State.

Van Orden was the largest banker in the northwestern part of Louisiana, and being a cautious, conservative man, his private bank was believed to be fully as safe as any of the national institutions.

There were greetings and hand-shakings all around. Another bottle of wine was disposed of, and then the landlord escorted MacMurphy to his room, the banker, the mayor, and the judge accompanying him, while the planter and the marshal departed, eager to tell their chums what a gay time they had had.

No. 13 was really a magnificent room; it was some twenty feet by fifteen and furnished in good style.

There were four windows, two of them looked out upon the main street, long windows reaching to the floor, so that one could step to the balcony without, which, after the Southern style, ran all along the front of the hotel, and two in the side wall of the apartment commanding a view of the lake.

"Ah, this will do very nicely," the senator remarked.

"It is the best room in the house, and I reckon thar ain't a pleasanter one in the town," the landlord declared with natural pride.

"How soon will supper be ready?" MacMurphy inquired. "My ride has given me a famous appetite."

"In about fifteen minutes: I will go and hurry things up," and Uncle Billy hustled out.

There were a couple of rocking-chairs in the room, and the senator took possession of one, the judge the other, Van Orden took a seat on the sofa and the mayor planted himself in an arm-chair by one of the windows.

"This is far better accommodation than I expected," the senator remarked. "I had an idea from the appearance of the place when I was here before that it had kind of run to seed: I only took breakfast here, you know."

"The old man keeps a pretty good house," the judge remarked. "But if Mr. Mayor here had had his say about the matter you wouldn't have had this room."

"Ah, now, it is too bad to bring me forward in this way," De Grandville exclaimed.

"How's that?" asked MacMurphy, understanding that there was something in the background.

"Simply on account of the number of the room."

"What is the number?"

"The unlucky thirteen!"

The banker started and shook his head.

"I had a presentiment of evil, and that is why I came with the senator!" he answered.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNWISE MOVE.

THIS declaration took the mayor and the judge completely by surprise.

"Is that possible?" the lawyer exclaimed.

"True as gospel!" replied the senator with a laugh. "You would not think that a steady, old sobersides like our friend here would be apt to give way to any such thing, but it is a fact."

"You astonish me!" the judge declared.

"I do not think it strange," the Creole observed. "I am not a superstitious man, but I

believe that oftentimes we are warned by pre-sentiments of coming events, and that we would have much better success in life if we would pay more attention to such things than the average man is apt to do."

"Neither am I superstitious, and, as a rule, I never have any presentiments," observed the matter-of-fact German-American. "But on this occasion I am sure that I have good reason to be a little nervous and I am certain Mr. MacMurphy will admit it."

"Oh, yes, gentleman, that is a fact, and I must acknowledge the corn," the senator remarked.

"I trust you will excuse the observation, but it seems to me that there is a little mystery connected with this affair," the lawyer said.

"It is easily explained!" replied the senator.

"My dear Mr. MacMurphy, do you consider it prudent?" asked the banker in a mysterious way, and casting a glance around as he spoke as if he wished to assure himself that it was not possible for any eavesdropper to play the spy upon the party.

The senator understood the meaning of the look, and he lay back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"You perceive, gentlemen, that Van Orden here has got them very bad; he is looking around now to be sure that some evil-minded person is not playing the spy upon us."

"Oh, there isn't much danger of that," the judge remarked. "I reckon we have got the hotel almost to ourselves. Our host is not troubled by many guests, and if it wasn't for his bar he would speedily starve to death. No one could overhear what we say except by skulking on the balcony, and as from where I sit here I can command a view of it, I can assure you that there isn't anybody there, so you need not hesitate to speak freely as far as any danger of being overheard is concerned."

The banker shook his head and the expression upon his face showed that he was far from being satisfied.

Again the senator laughed, and it was evident that he thought the matter unworthy of serious thought.

"Well, gentlemen, I am going to make a clean breast of it, notwithstanding Van Orden plainly thinks I am very unwise to do so," he said.

"Such is my opinion, although I must confess I cannot give a good substantial reason for it," the banker remarked.

"I will risk the danger," the senator went on. "You three men here are the nearest and dearest friends that I have in the world, and though since I have been in politics I begin to think that the ancient sharp, King Solomon, knew what he was talking about when he said that all men are liars, and have seen enough base ingratitude to almost make me lose faith in my fellow-men, yet I am satisfied that you three, all of whom were brother soldiers with me, are not the men to betray a trust."

"Well, as far as that goes I reckon we are about as safe men to tie to as you could scare up in the State, but maybe that is not saying much," the judge remarked with a comical smile on his fat face.

"Well, now for the story, for I am going to risk it, anyway. You, judge, are better acquainted with my political and railroad life than the others, and you know that I have always gone on the idea of making a big bluff when the circumstances seem to demand it, and in the early part of my career the bluffs were all genuine ones for I had mighty little money to back my operations."

"I bought my first railroad for half a million, when I couldn't have raised twenty thousand dollars in cash if my life had depended upon it, but I had good indorsers, and cheek carried me through."

"Now, up in this new country, I think there is a good chance for a man about my size to make some money, and I want to make my appearance with a blaze of fireworks, so to speak, to make the folk rub their eyes, you know, and cry: 'Hang me if MacMurphy isn't a regular bu'ster!'

"I am to give Joe Hazelhurst \$50,000 for his plantation, and I have made arrangement to pay him the money in fifty crisp, new, one thousand dollar bills, and I have got the cash now here, in my wallet, in my breast pocket," and the senator tapped with his fingers on his breast as he spoke.

"What do you think of that, gentlemen?" cried the banker, unable to restrain himself. "Is it not an extremely unwise act for him to carry such a sum of money around with him in a country which has plenty of rascals who would be glad to cut a man's throat for ten dollars?"

"You see how the old thing works, boys!" MacMurphy exclaimed, laughing. "Van Orden is just about as much worried over this money as though it was his own, and it was his life that was threatened. Why, when he found that I could not be persuaded out of the notion, hang me if he did not volunteer to come with me so as to act as a body-guard."

"That was certainly acting the part of a friend," the judge remarked.

"Oh, yes, I appreciate the feeling, I assure

you, although I am not to be persuaded that I am running any risk at all. In the first place, you must take into consideration the fact that no one, except Van Orden, knows that I have the money."

"But, senator!" cried the mayor at this point, "you must remember that all the town knows you are going to buy Joe Hazelhurst's plantation and pay over to him an extremely large sum to-morrow."

"Very true, but do you think that any one imagines that I am going to pay over any of the sum in good, solid cash?" MacMurphy demanded.

"No, I presume not," the mayor replied, after thinking over the matter for a moment. "It is the custom to settle such a matter by check."

"Exactly, and that is where my safety lies. If it were known that I have any such sum as that in bank-bills on my person I do not doubt there would have been enterprise enough in Caddo parish to raise a gang to hold up the coach in which I came in the good old Western style."

"But I am on the ground with my money, all right, and to-morrow I will pay it over to Joe Hazelhurst, and I can just imagine his anxiety when he discovers the shape the money is in," and the senator laughed heartily.

"Joe is a good, square fellow and served with credit in the war, but he is as nervous as a woman, and you can just bet all the money you can get your hands on, that when he finds he has got to look after fifty thousand dollars in bank-bills he will raise a force to help him guard the treasure until he can deposit it in some bank."

"He will act like a wise man," the mayor observed. "And, my dear senator, do not, I beg, think I am an alarmist when I remind you that there are yet some hours to come before you pay the money to Major Hazelhurst, and, although you have it now, that is no proof that you will have it in the morning. Under the circumstances I regarded it as a most unlucky chance that you should be assigned to a room bearing the number thirteen."

MacMurphy shook his head a little impatiently; he was rather a headstrong man and not a whit superstitious.

"My dear De Grandville you mean well, of course; you are rather given to mystic things, being so great a scholar, but I, only a rough, plain man of the world, do not take any stock in these yarns at all."

"This room seems to me to be tolerably secure; there is a good bolt on the door and sticks to fasten the windows; I have my pistols, a brace of revolvers that have never yet failed me, and am a light sleeper, therefore I feel perfectly sure that if any one attempts to enter this room to-night I will give him so warm a reception that it will be the last time that he will ever try such a game."

"I tell you how the matter can be arranged!" the judge exclaimed.

"How?" asked Van Orden, evidently anxious.

"We will all stay and sleep with the senator!" was the reply.

This announcement produced a general laugh.

"Oh, come now, do you think that can be worked?" MacMurphy exclaimed. "Four of us in one bed and that not a particularly large one?"

"Well, I suppose we would be rather crowded," the judge remarked with a sober face, just as if he was in earnest about the matter. "But I tell you how we can arrange one, you and I, senator, will take the bed, because you are an honored guest, and I am getting old and feeble, then Van Orden and De Grandville can draw lots for the sofa and the one who loses will have to content himself with a chair."

"We have all of us seen the time, boys, during the late unpleasantness, when we would gladly have given all the money we could raise to be allowed to take a shake-down on the floor of a room like this."

"My dear judge, the war is over and we do not sleep out in the swamps any more," MacMurphy observed.

"I begin to believe that you are all in a conspiracy to make me nervous so as to spoil my night's rest!" the senator declared. "But I can tell you that I am as obstinate as a mule when my mind is made up. Now in this matter you cannot persuade me that I run any risk. I am going to sleep in this room to-night and sleep here alone, and when the morning comes if I am not in possession of my fifty thousand dollars, then the man who has taken it from me is smarter than I am, and that is all there is to it. Why, gentlemen, have you such expert rascals up in the Caddo that a man is not safe if he is known to have money in his possession?"

"Ah, it is evident that you have never heard of the Bad Man of the Big Bayou," said the mayor with a grave face.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF THE TERROR.

FROM the expression on the features of MacMurphy and Van Orden it was apparent that the mayor had spoken the truth.

"Well, that is a rather startling appellation," MacMurphy remarked, dryly. "I say, gentle-

men, I hope this is not a little game that you have gone into to have some fun at my expense?"

"My dear senator, I hope you do not for a moment imagine that I would be a party to any such proceeding!" the mayor exclaimed.

"Yes, I know you are not a practical joker, but this wretch of a judge is, and is particularly noted in that line, and how do I know that I am not being made a victim?"

Judge Waldron laughed.

"Well, I suppose I must plead guilty to the charge," he remarked. "I have indulged in a few jokes in my time, but on this particular occasion it is no joke. The Bad Man of the Big Bayou is no myth as quite a number of good people in this parish of Caddo can testify."

"Yes, yes, my dear senator, it is the truth I assure you!" the mayor exclaimed.

"Really, gentlemen, you excite my curiosity, and I should like to have you explain. What is this Bad Man of the Big Bayou?"

The question was addressed directly to the mayor, but he looked at the judge.

"Let Mr. Waldron tell the story," De Grandville said. "It is more in his line than in mine."

"Fire away, judge, you have the floor!" the senator exclaimed.

"Yes, proceed, judge; my curiosity is also excited," the banker remarked.

"All right; give me your ears then!" the lawyer exclaimed, in a theatrical way.

"Now, gentlemen, it is a plain, round, unvarnished tale I am about to relate. Some of the particulars border on the marvelous, and I don't vouch for the truth of them; you must draw your own conclusions, and try to sift the truth from the falsehood, bearing in mind the old saying that a good story never loses anything in the telling."

"Of course, it gathers, and the more it is told the greater it becomes," the senator remarked.

"Exactly; but 'I tell the tale as it was told to me,'" the lawyer replied.

"Now, in the first place, you must understand that the Big Bayou lies to the northeast of Lake Caddo, and is in a wild and desolate country, a regular fastness, the haunt of the bear, wild-cat and similar game."

"Yes, I know that," the senator remarked. "Joe Hazelhurst described it to me, and said that the country all around the bayou afforded excellent hunting."

"That is true; to the eastward of the bayou, between it and Red River, are some fine plantations, which ship from the town of Dixon's Cross Roads," the judge explained.

"About a year ago, on one of these plantations, about half-way between the Big Bayou and Dixon's Cross Roads, lived an old fellow called Uncle Sammy Bullet. He and his sister, an old maid, were the only white people on the place with the exception of the overseer.

"Uncle Sammy was a bachelor, a close-fisted old codger, a good deal of a miser, and commonly believed to be worth considerable money, and as he had once suffered a loss by the breaking of a bank in which he kept his funds, he had no confidence in such institutions and kept his money concealed in his house.

"Of course, like all misers, he declared that he hadn't any money—that his plantation only afforded him a bare living, and that it was as much as he could do to get along."

"No one believed that, you know," the mayor remarked at this point. "The old man had a good plantation, knew how to run it, and has been known to get five thousand dollars for a single cotton crop."

"Under the circumstances it was natural that the prediction should be made that some dark night an attempt would be made to relieve Uncle Sammy of his cash. We are seldom without a choice assortment of outlaws in this neighborhood, for the swamps of the Caddo, and the adjoining bayous, afford them a secure hiding-place.

"The old man had been warned of the danger he ran a hundred times, but he always protested that he did not have any money so that it would not be of any use for any one to trouble him. Then, too, the old fellow would add, with a chuckle, that he kept the fiercest pack of dogs that could be found in the neighborhood, and that these brutes, who were always at large after dark, would make mince-meat of any stranger who might attempt to come on the place.

"One night though the old miser found that he had reckoned 'without the host.' His overseer and hands were all away at a merry-making on a plantation in the neighborhood.

"Uncle Sammy and his sister were alone in the house; but went to bed early. The old man had a room on the second story, the doors had heavy locks, the old fashioned kind that could be doubly locked by turning the key around twice, and stout bolts, top and bottom. The windows which looked out on a balcony were also fastened with stout catches which the old man had got from Shreveport for the express purpose.

"I am taking particular care to describe these things so you will fully understand the affair.

"On this particular night, Uncle Sammy

went to bed about ten o'clock. As nearly as he could judge he had slept about two hours, until midnight, you understand, when he suddenly awoke with the impression that something was wrong.

"The moonlight was streaming full in the room through the windows, so the apartment was about as light as by day, and the old man could see all objects plainly.

"The room seemed to be full of smoke, and Uncle Sammy's first impression was that the house was on fire, although he couldn't understand how it could be, as there hadn't been a fire in the house for a long time.

"His first impulse, naturally, was to spring up, but, to his surprise, he found that he could not move, and then he made the discovery that the smoke was not a common one, but possessed a peculiar, disagreeable smell, and it seemed to be suffocating him, although he did not cough. Then, just as he was about to pass into insensibility, a dark form glided across the floor.

"The intruder evidently thought that Uncle Sammy's senses had departed, and so he came from where he had been concealed in some corner."

"Upon my word, this is about as strange a tale as I ever heard," the senator remarked, as the judge paused for a moment.

"Very strange," the banker assented.

"The old man got a good view of the stranger, and though his senses were in a whirl, yet he was not so far gone as not to be able to see what the man was like.

The stranger was unnaturally tall and slender, dressed in a sort of a long, black gown, something like the robes worn by the monks in the olden time, which completely covered him from head to heel; there was a cowl to it with an odd, peculiar, pointed peak.

"From out of the cowl looked the strangest face that the old man had ever seen.

"It was long and narrow, the lower part completely hidden by a short, black beard; the nose was remarkably large and curved like an eagle's beak, and yet not a Jew's nose at all, but more resembling the nasal organ that the ancient painters gave to Satan when they represented him in doublet and hose, seeking for prey upon the earth."

The others nodded; they were all familiar with the likeness of the "Evil One" when represented as a cavalier.

"Another strange thing about the face was its peculiar whiteness, of course rendered still more striking by the jet-black beard.

"It was more like the face of the dead than the living!"

"By Jove! this goes ahead of anything I ever heard of!" the senator declared. "But hold on a bit! Did the old man really see such a man as is described, or is it a fiction of the imagination? People when frightened out of their wits often see wonderful things, you know."

"Wait until the story is ended before you ask questions," the judge replied.

"Well, Uncle Sammy had no sooner gathered all these details in his mind than he became insensible.

"When he recovered the use of his wits it was broad daylight; he was still lying on the bed but bound and gagged so that he was as helpless as an infant, and there he remained until his overseer, becoming alarmed at his non-appearance, sent to the next plantation for Doctor Kingsland; the door of the bedroom was broken in and the old man discovered.

"He was pretty nearly dead, but under the doctor's care soon recovered sufficiently to be able to relate what had befallen him, and although the doors and windows were all fastened, so that it was a mystery how the intruder either got into the room or got out of it, yet there was plain proof that he had been there for the place looked as if a cyclone had been playing with it.

"The carpet was ripped up so that the floor could be seen, the fellow being in search of some secret hiding-place where he expected the old man had hidden his cash.

"The drawers were all out of the bureau and tables in the room, and the things pitched on the floor.

"And the first words that old Sammy spoke was in reference to his money. 'The mattress—for God's sake look at the mattress!' he cried.

"The old man had a secret hoard—some five thousand dollars, he said, in the mattress, but it was gone; the man had ripped open both mattresses, and the hidden money had not escaped him.

"The alarm was at once given, the country raised and search with bloodhounds made for the trail of the robber. It was struck, or a trail supposed to be his, for whoever made the footprints wore an enormous pair of rubbers, not boots, but overshoes, for the heel-marks were faint.

"The trail was followed into the Big Bayou swamps and there lost, although for a week the most diligent search was made, for Uncle Sammy's blood was up, and, miser though he was, he offered a thousand dollars reward for the capture of the scoundrel, no matter whether the money was recovered or not; but nobody got the thousand dollars."

CHAPTER V.

MORE OF THE TALE.

"BUT didn't you get any clew at all?" the senator asked.

"Not the slightest," the judge replied. "As I before hinted, we have as fine a collection of ruffians in this neighborhood as can be scared up anywhere in the State, and as the outrage had excited the whole of the surrounding country—almost everybody who was able to get away joining in the chase—the thousand dollars reward was a great inducement, of course—ever suspicious character was immediately arrested and made to give an account of himself.

"Some of the fellows were inclined to be ugly, but when they found that the whole parish was up in arms, a couple of hundred men and as many dogs, of high and low degree, like the coon of the story, they came down.

"All of them were brought before Uncle Sammy to give him a chance to identify them. You will perceive in this matter we did not confine ourselves strictly to the forms of the law, but went on a 'fishing excursion' after evidence, to use the legal phrase. But all our efforts were fruitless. The old man declared that none of the fellows whom we arrested in the least resembled his midnight visitor, and in our search of the haunts of these men, we did not find any evidence to connect any of them with the crime, so they were all released."

"And that ends the Uncle Sammy episode, I presume," the senator remarked.

"It does; the old man never got any trace of his money, or of the rascal."

"A clever robbery, but as I said before, did not the old man's imagination deceive him in regard to the appearance of the scoundrel?" MacMurphy asked.

"Wait, I haven't finished yet," the judge replied. "After our ill-luck in the search, a good many of us came to the conclusion that it was possible the old man's story could not be implicitly relied upon. I, in particular, was a doubting Thomas, and I took the trouble to put Doctor Kingsland through a regular cross-examination. The doctor, you will remember, lived on an adjoining plantation and was the man called upon by the overseer to help him break in the door."

The senator nodded.

"And by the way, let me at this point take occasion to remark that you will find Doctor Kingsland, who is your near neighbor, one of the finest gentlemen on the Caddo. A man of the old school, an excellent judge of whisky, and one of the best short-card players in the State. A good doctor, too, studied in Europe for five years, and what he doesn't know about medicine is not worth knowing."

"I shall be pleased to meet him," MacMurphy remarked.

"Well, to return to my mutton, I had a long talk with the doctor about Uncle Sammy. I asked him plainly if he thought his statement could be relied upon, and he answered that it was his opinion that it could be.

"The strangeness of the case had interested him, and so, after the old man had told his story, he questioned him very carefully.

"Uncle Sammy, bear in mind, although an old man, is remarkably keen-witted and clear-headed, and the doctor felt satisfied that although he had been under the influence of a powerful drug, yet his mind had worked with its usual clearness and he was perfectly competent to describe what had occurred before he fell into insensibility."

"But I say—this drug business—this aromatic smoke, it seems like a passage out of some novel describing life in the dark ages!" MacMurphy exclaimed.

"So it does, and it was this particular part of Uncle Sammy's story which gave rise to the suspicion that he had not been in his right mind at the particular time when the smoke overcame him.

"Most people believed that there hadn't been any smoke, but that the robber had used chloroform, or something of that kind, which had made Uncle Sammy light in the head, and that the fantastic figure and aromatic smoke, which had the power of producing insensibility, only existed in his imagination.

"I submitted this to the doctor and he admitted that he had puzzled greatly over the matter. After the old man told his story, the doctor asked him bluntly if his mind had not been wandering, but Uncle Sammy denied it indignantly.

"Now, in regard to the smoke, the doctor looked into the subject—Kingsland is believed to have one of the finest libraries in the State—and he said that the stink-pot, the well-known weapon of the Chinese, was something of the same kind, for its offensive fumes overpowered all who were brought in contact with it."

"Aha!" exclaimed the senator, who had been following the recital with the closest attention, "that is true enough. I remember now that I have read accounts of this extremely offensive weapon, but is there any Chinese in this neighborhood?"

"There isn't one in the parish of Caddo to my knowledge," the judge replied. "But we have

plenty of negroes here, and many of them are Voodoo worshipers, in secret, of course, and it is well-known that the High Priests of Voodoo are skilled in the use of herbs and roots, and it may be that some one of them possesses the secret of making this suffocating smoke."

"These Voodoo men are bad fellows," the mayor observed. "And with their conjuration and the power they possess over the ignorant blacks, they have been known to make much trouble."

"Ah, I see, you suspect that some of the negroes had a hand in this affair, but the victim describes the man as being white," MacMurphy remarked.

"Yes, and if the white face was a mask, as I suggested to Doctor Kingsland, when we talked the matter over, there isn't a negro in the neighborhood that answers to the description given by Uncle Sammy," the judge assented.

"And now we will drop this case and come to number two," he continued.

"About three months after the attack on Uncle Sammy, just as the talk in regard to the affair was dying out, Big Ben Folsom, a well-to-do planter who lives about a mile from your Hazelhurst place, was driving home from the landing, Dixon's Cross Roads, you know; he had just shipped his cotton crop and had a little over two thousand dollars in cash with him.

Folsom had tarried to drink a little whisky with the boys at the Cross Roads, so it was late when he reached that portion of his homeward road which runs through a part of the Big Bayou swamp, but as there was a bright moonlight, and the planter was well-armed, he never dreamed of danger.

"The road runs through a heavy bit of timber just at the edge of the swamp, and Folsom, who has a head like iron, and, notwithstanding the whisky he had drank, knew what he was about, took out his revolver and cocked it, so as to be ready for action in case any one might be lying in wait for him in the timber, and he drove through at a pretty good gait; he had a span of mules on a big farm wagon.

"He got through the timber all right without seeing anything suspicious, and as he drove into the open country, he put the hammer of his revolver down, and just then a slight noise made him turn his head and there standing in the wagon, with his arm raised to strike him with something that looked more like a big sausage than any thing else, was the very identical ruffian that Uncle Sammy described, white face, black beard, and black gown.

"Involuntarily, Big Ben threw up his hand to guard his head, but it didn't save him, for the weapon seemed to be elastic like a whalebone; it bent right over his guard and gave him a crack on the skull which made him see more stars than any astronomer ever described.

"It knocked all the sense out of him instantaneously and over he went from the wagon to the road; the mules took fright and galloped home as fast as they could go.

"Folsom's house was only a mile off, and when the mules, with the empty wagon, arrived there, an alarm was at once raised and a party started out in search of the missing man. He was found in the road, insensible, and carried home. Doctor Kingsland was summoned and he fancied that Folsom must have had a fit, as he couldn't find any wounds, the terrific blow on the head, strange to say, had not left any mark, but when the planter came to his senses he told the story of the attack. His money was gone, nothing but the empty pocketbook remained, and now it was seen that Uncle Sammy had not exaggerated.

"It was supposed that the ruffian was concealed in one of the trees and dropped into the wagon as it passed beneath him."

"Yes, and I know what the weapon was—a sand-club; that is another oriental device," the senator remarked.

"So Doctor Kingsland supposed; he felt worried over the attack on the planter, for Folsom was badly hurt and it was a month before he was all right again, and then too, Big Ben had been after one of the Doc's girls; I forgot to mention, by the way, that Kingsland has a daughter and a niece that just take the shine off of any other girls on the Caddo; you will find them mighty attractive, and neither one is engaged yet, so there is a chance for you."

"Glad to hear it, although I admit I am not a marrying man," MacMurphy replied.

"You may change your mind after you see one of these beauties," the judge observed.

"Well, to come back to my story again: a hue and cry was at once raised, and a more vigorous search made, if anything than before, but it was the same old story though."

"The trail was struck—the man with the big rubber shoes—run into the swamps of the Big Bayou and there lost."

"By this time people began to get a little skeery, and everybody that had any money in the house made haste to put it away in a bank, so as not to invite a visit from this mysterious ruffian, who had been dubbed the Bad Man of the Big Bayou."

"And folks who were out after nightfall took care to have their guns handy, and the nigs, who believe the man to be the devil himself,

will not venture out after dark unless there is a gang of them."

"Twice more within the year this fellow has appeared, and the last time I was the victim."

The mayor nodded assent while the others looked astonished.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JUDGE'S EXPERIENCE.

"You don't mean it!" the senator exclaimed, and Van Orden also expressed his astonishment.

"It is a sure enough fact, and yet I am about the last man who you would suppose could be taken into camp."

"That is true," MacMurphy remarked.

"I will give you the particulars and you will see that the job was done in an extremely workmanlike manner," observed the judge.

"About two months ago there was a scrub race in the town here between two of our citizens, and we had a general jollification; in the evening, a half-a-dozen of us sat down in a room in the hotel here to see who was the biggest chief at poker.

"It was a choice party, some of the leading men of the section, and by the time that midnight came the game had got to be a pretty heavy one. Joe Hazelhurst and I were the principal winners, Doctor Kingsland, who is universally admitted to be one of the best players we have, had dreadful poor luck; the cards didn't run his way at all, but he played so skillfully that his losses were not heavy. Finally there came a stage in the game when Joe Hazelhurst and I were the only two that stayed in, the rest were cleaned out; we had got about all the money there was in the room, and it became a duel between us two.

"I was the victor, and I rose from the table almost fifteen hundred dollars ahead of the game.

"It was then almost one o'clock. We took a parting drink, and then the party broke up.

"I am a widower, you know, and after my wife died I gave up housekeeping, and fitted up a room in the back part of my office, where I keep bachelor's hall, getting my meals at the hotel here.

"My office is about a thousand yards down the street.

"It was a bright moonlight night, and we stood and joked with each other a few minutes in front of the hotel while the niggers were bringing out the horses. As it happened, I was the only townsman in the party. Hazelhurst was delayed on account of his dark having got full, and the boy had to be hunted up in the barn, where he had gone to sleep. The doctor, who was going Hazelhurst's way, offered to wait for him, but Joe told him to ride on, and he would overtake him.

"Then, after they were all gone, Hazelhurst suddenly discovered that he had a five dollar bill in his vest-pocket, and as I had got all the rest of his money, he challenged me to come into the bar-room and throw dice for the five."

"You accepted, of course?" the senator remarked.

"Yes, and succeeded in winning the five without any trouble, much to Joe's disgust, for, as he confessed after the contest was over, the idea had struck him when he found the bill, that it might cause his luck to turn."

"That is the deuce of gambling," MacMurphy remarked, with the air of a sage. "When a man gets going he never is willing to stop as long as he can raise a stake."

"We had another drink, and then Joe suddenly made up his mind that he wouldn't go home, but would stop all night at the hotel, and he wanted me to stop, too, and have a little more poker, as, of course, his word was good for any money that he might lose. But I had had enough, and declined, telling him that he could have his revenge at some other time; it took me some time to get away from him, so it was nearly two o'clock when I got to my place.

"My shanty is a small, one-story building, about fifteen by thirty. The office is in the front, and my sleeping-room in the rear. A door in the front leads to the office, and there is also a side door to the rear of the building, so I can get into my sleeping-room without going through the office.

"The windows are all guarded by stout shutters, and the doors have extra good locks, for I often have valuable documents in my possession, and I don't want my castle so insecure that any tramp with a common key can gain admission.

"I entered by the side-door; it was locked, and the window-shutters were fastened; there wasn't anything out of the way to excite my suspicions. You must understand, gentlemen, that though I had drank my share of the liquor during the evening, yet I knew perfectly well what I was about, and was very far from being under the influence of liquor."

"I can believe that!" the senator exclaimed. "I have been with you two or three times when you ought to have gone under the table, but, as far as I could see, the liquor had no effect on you."

"I believe I bear the reputation of being able

to carry as much liquor as any man in the State of Louisiana," the judge remarked with a great deal of dignity.

"But to resume. I entered my room, and though it was not a warm night, the room seemed so close that before I attempted to strike a light I opened one of the windows, throwing back the shutter, and allowed the moonlight to stream into the room.

"Then it occurred to me that with such a bright moonlight there wasn't any use to have a candle, therefore I pulled up the curtain, which worked from the bottom, instead of the top, so I could have plenty of light, and yet not be exposed to the gaze of any one who might chance to be passing without. I first closed and fastened the window, of course.

"And just as I got the curtain adjusted to my satisfaction, I suddenly became conscious that there was a strong smell of smoke in my room, and as I hadn't lit a match, and there had not been any fire in the apartment for weeks, I was amazed, but no thought that there was anything wrong entered my mind.

"I turned slowly around—I will admit, gentlemen, that I presume that the liquor which I had drank was beginning to affect my head just about this time, but I knew perfectly well what I was about, you understand, only I was not as quick to jump to a conclusion as I would have been if I had not been indulging so freely—and there, to my utter astonishment, in the center of the room holding in his hand a dark, candle-shaped substance from which the smoke was proceeding was this Bad Man of the Big Bayou.

"There was no mistake about it—I saw the thing, what ever it is, man or devil, as plainly as I now see you, gentlemen.

There was the white face, gleaming with an unnatural light, the hooked nose and the closely shrouded figure.

"Already my senses were affected by the infernal, suffocating smoke, my brain began to reel, and the walls of the apartment to dance around me.

"I essayed to pull my gun, but the intruder glided forward with a cat-like step, shoved the smoke apparatus right under my nose and I collapsed.

"The next thing I knew, it was broad daylight, I was lying on my back on the floor with a crowd of neighbors 'round me, trying their best to bring me out of the fit into which they supposed I had fallen.

"It was about ten o'clock, and my non-appearance had excited remark. The door of my establishment had been tried and found fastened as also were the windows, but noticing that the shutter of one of them was open, a ladder had been brought, and, looking into the room over the curtain, they saw me lying on the floor; then the door was forced open and I was attended to.

"The first thing I did, when I revived, was to feel for my money, and, as I had expected, every cent was gone; the fifteen hundred that I had won at poker and some three hundred that I had besides.

"Then I told my story, to the vast astonishment of everybody.

"Again we raised the hue and cry; it was getting kind of monotonous by this time. We struck the trail as usual—the big-footed man with the rubber shoes—run it into the Big Bayou swamp and there lost it, just the same as before.

"For three days, a hundred men, with a hundred dogs, and a couple of hundred negroes, searched all through that swamp as thoroughly as possible and all we had was our labor for our pains. Not the slightest trace of the man we sought could we discover."

"This is really a marvelous story," MacMurphy remarked after the judge finished. "One thing is certain, and that is that this fellow is no common rogue."

"Oh, that is true enough, and I suppose that ought to be some consolation to the men who have been robbed," the judge observed, dryly. "Like the man whose wife ran away with a neighbor, and the deserted husband said he was glad that she had picked out the handsomest man in the town, and had not disgraced him by running away with some infernal, ill-looking scoundrel."

"I was the last victim and as the rascal has put a space of two or three months between each of his operations, it is about time that he made his appearance again," the judge continued. "Now you, with your fifty thousand dollars, would be a tempting prize, and if you persist in sleeping alone in this room to-night I should not be surprised if you received a visit before morning."

Waldron made this declaration with the gravest face possible, but there was a sly twinkle in his eyes which belied his words.

"Ah, yes, of course!" MacMurphy cried in derision. "Now, you are coming some of your funny business, but it will not work, I can tell you! I am too old a hand to be easily frightened. In the first place, no one but we four in this room know that I have the money and if it was not a secret, I would defy the most expert thief to rob me when I am on my guard and prepared for such a thing."

"Then you refuse our guardianship?" the judge asked.

"Yes, most decidedly!" the senator cried. "I am not afraid of your robber spook, and if he can get my fifty thousand dollars to-night, with me on my guard, he is welcome to it!"

The mayor shook his head and the banker followed his example.

But the conversation was interrupted at this point by the landlord who came to announce that supper was ready, and the party followed him to the dining-room, where they did ample justice to mine host's fried chicken and corn-bread.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE WATCH.

AFTER supper the party took chairs and sat out in front of the hotel until after ten o'clock, the senator holding quite a levee, for every citizen of the town that amounted to anything, and a great many that didn't, thought it necessary to come up to the hotel and get an introduction to the distinguished visitor.

So the evening passed quickly away in genial conversation, for there are no men in this wide world who understand how to make a stranger more comfortable than your true Southerner, and all exerted themselves to be agreeable to the new-comer.

The only trouble that the senator experienced was in refusing the invitations to visit the bar, for fully two-thirds of the leading, and not leading citizens, after being introduced, quietly hinted that they were on their way to procure some liquid refreshment, and wouldn't the senator and his friends honor them with their presence?

Your true Southerner is like the blue-blooded Spaniard. He may only have a single coin, but he wraps his ragged mantle around him with the air of a king and invites his guest to share it.

But MacMurphy, whose curiosity had been strongly excited by the strange story of the Bad Man of the Big Bayou, and whose egotism had been offended by the implied belief of his friends that he would not be able to take care of his treasure, declined the invitations in a courtly, dignified way, which seemed to assure the inviter that though he could not accept the invitation, yet he felt extremely honored and flattered by the politeness.

The senator had made up his mind to keep his head clear; he knew enough of Southern hospitality to understand that if he took one drink it would certainly lead to a dozen others, and he had determined not to indulge at all.

About half-past ten the party broke up; bidding their friends good night, the four went upstairs to the parlor, which was on the same floor as the senator's room.

A couple of bottles of wine had been ordered to the parlor and these, with the assistance of the landlord the party dispatched, then the senator was escorted to his room.

"You are determined then to risk the danger and you reject our kindly offer," the judge remarked in an extremely solemn manner as MacMurphy unlocked the door of his room and opened it.

"Oh, bosh!" the senator exclaimed, "you cannot scare me for a cent!"

"Well, we will be near at hand; I arranged that with the landlord, De Grandville and I have Number 6 and Van Orden Number 7, directly opposite to your apartment," Waldron remarked.

"You don't mean to say that you and De Grandville are going to stay here to-night?" MacMurphy exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, you can depend on us! We are going to stick by you; if this mysterious robber assails you during the dark watches of the night, all you will have to do is to howl and we will come to your assistance."

"Oh, this is too ridiculous!" the senator exclaimed. "From the way you are going on I should think you were a lot of old women! I am willing to bet you two to one that no one troubles me!"

"Senator, we cannot accept your bet, because honest men ought not to win a friend's money on a sure thing."

The other laughed at this rejoinder, and MacMurphy entered his apartment.

"You will see in the morning that I am proof against your spook!" he declared. "Good night!"

The salutation was returned, then the three entered room No. 6, from which a door led into No. 7, and the senator closed his portal.

The judge, who had the candle, placed it upon the table, De Grandville shut the door, and then an idea seemed suddenly to strike him, and he exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, did you notice the coincidence—the numbers of these rooms?"

"Eh?" said the judge.

"What do you mean?" asked Van Orden, helping himself to a chair.

"Six and seven are thirteen!" the mayor replied, in a mysterious way.

Waldron laughed and took a seat upon the bed.

"Oh, come now, De Grandville! I think you

are carrying it a little too far," he observed. "It is all very well to joke MacMurphy, but you don't mean to say that you are attaching any importance to this coincidence?"

"Upon my word I do!" the mayor declared. "I do not think I am superstitious, either, but I tell you, gentlemen, there is something in these things; science cannot explain it, it is true, but science cannot explain everything. There are mysteries in nature, into which it is plainly intended that men should not pry."

"My dear mayor, if our friend had not this fifty thousand dollars with him, you would not give the matter a thought," the judge declared.

"I am certain I should not," the banker remarked. "But knowing that he *has* the money, I am inclined to be uneasy, particularly since I have heard about this mysterious robber."

"Exactly, and there is the whole thing in a nutshell! One fact, and imagination does the rest," the judge remarked.

"Now, gentlemen, I will observe, that though I have done my best to joke MacMurphy about this thing, yet, in my opinion, his argument that he is not likely to be troubled, because no one but us three here know that he has this large sum of money with him, is sound, and, as he said, if any one succeeds in robbing him, now that he has been warned, and is on his guard, it will really be a wonderful thing."

"Very true; now, my dear judge, I am not going to attempt to argue this matter with you, for I know very well that your ability is such that when it comes to argument, as the Irishman says, you would be able to prove that black was white, and white no color at all," De Grandville remarked. "But in this case the old rhyme comes in:

"The man convinced against his will,
Is of his own opinion still."

"And that is my position at present. I feel as if there was danger in the air; the thought came to me before I knew that the senator had this vast sum of money with him, so that had nothing to do with it; the fact did not influence my imagination, as you suggested."

"That cannot be disputed," Waldron admitted, but he did not give utterance to the thoughts which were in his mind.

The mayor was a man strong in imagination, a dreamer, in fact; when in the mood, De Grandville could turn off quite excellent poetry, and was just the nature to give way to fanciful ideas.

"Now, I am anxious," the mayor continued. "I have a presentiment that all is not well—that danger threatens our guest. I cannot give reasons for it; a man cannot give reasons for presentiments, but they produce just as strong an impression upon me as though I was able to back them up with the strongest kind of proofs.

"I feel anxious for the senator, and therefore I shall not go to bed to-night. I will sit here by the entrance, with the door ajar, and then if harm comes to Mr. MacMurphy, it will be because some devil from the other world takes charge of the matter."

And from the firmness manifested in the mayor's tone, it was evident that he had fully made up his mind.

"The idea is a good one!" the banker declared. "I too am anxious, particularly since I have heard the story of this mysterious robber, and I do not care to go to bed, so, Mr. De Grandville, I will join you in your watch."

Judge Waldron wondered how it was that superstition should be able to make two such intelligent men so pig-headed, but, as he saw they were deeply in earnest, he refrained from expressing his honest opinion.

"Well, I am agreeable, but allow me to suggest what seems to me to be the best way of arranging the matter, for, of course, I intend to share your watch," he remarked. "There are three of us, and although it is desirable that two should watch together, for then there will not be the danger of being overtaken by sleep, for although one man might nod, two would be more apt to keep awake, there isn't any necessity of all three of us being on the alert."

"Now, let us arrange it in this way. Two watch while the third sleeps; it is now a little after eleven," he observed, consulting his watch. "I will lie down for two hours. At one, I am to be awakened, and one of you rest, say Van Orden. At three, you, Mr. Mayor, take a nap and Van Orden comes to the front; at five, I lie down again, although, by that time, it will probably be safe for us all to go to sleep, for the danger will be over."

The others thought that this plan was an excellent one, and so expressed themselves.

"Of course, gentlemen, we will keep this matter quiet," De Grandville remarked. "We will not even allow the senator to know that we kept watch through the night, for if all goes well, and he is not troubled, he would have a joke on us that we would not be apt to hear the last of for some time."

"No doubt about that!" the judge declared.

"I am not a man who often allows himself to be influenced by presentiments," the banker observed in his sober, stolid way. "But in this case it seemed to me to be such a fool-hardy

thing—this carrying such a vast sum of money—that I have allowed myself to become nervous; it is not business, and it has made me very uneasy."

"You are right enough there," Waldron coincided. "And now, gentlemen, as life is short and time is flying, I will lie down."

"By the by, I would suggest that you put the candle out, so that if any one should come prowling along the entry they will not be able to discover that we are on the watch, for I take it that it is more desirable to capture any scoundrel that may try to rob the senator, than to frighten him away, and, in furtherance of that object, I would just leave the door ajar, so that no one can tell that it is open without an examination. The moon gives light enough for us to see what we are about, although it does not shine directly into the room."

The others considered these suggestions to be good and they were acted upon at once.

The candle was extinguished, Waldron stretched himself upon the bed, and the other two sat down by the door, a crack of which only was left open, and so the vigil began.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE NIGHT.

AFTER closing his door MacMurphy carefully locked and bolted it.

Then he went and examined all the windows. After the primitive fashion, common to country places, there were no catches on the windows, and the lower sash was the only one that moved.

The two windows which were in the front of the room, looking out on the balcony, had sticks which, placed on top of the lower sashes, with the upper end wedged against the top of the windows, securely fastened them.

"Those are all right," the senator remarked, as he drew the curtains down. "That stick is a primitive mode of fastening, but is, probably, just as safe as any of the patent catches, and decidedly safer than the common fastenings, which any one can easily open from the outside with a thin-bladed knife."

MacMurphy, being a resident of a big city, and a great reader of all sorts of literature, was well-posted in regard to the means by which skillful thieves gain admission to houses supposed to be securely fastened.

Next he examined the windows in the side wall, looking out toward the lake.

But as these were twelve or fifteen feet from the ground it had not been considered necessary to provide them with fastenings of any kind.

"Oh, here, this will not do!" the senator exclaimed, upon making this discovery.

"There isn't anything to prevent any evil-disposed person from coming with a light ladder and getting in through either one of these windows. I must block that game! I cannot fasten the windows so that they may not be opened very well, but I can fix it so that they cannot be raised without a noise being made sufficient to wake me."

This was easily arranged.

There was a small glass water-decanter on the wash-stand, also a little pitcher, filled with ice-water, which the host's care had provided.

The two vessels were relieved of their contents and then one of them placed on the upper part of the lower sash of each window, so balanced that any attempt to raise the sash would surely cause them to tumble to the floor.

"There!" the senator exclaimed when the articles were arranged to his satisfaction, "if anybody succeeds in getting in through these windows without alarming me, they are smarter than any rascals I have ever heard of."

Then an idea occurred to him and he turned his gaze toward the door.

"That lock and bolt seem to be all right," he remarked. "But, if I remember rightly, I have heard that hotel thieves sometimes ramper with the screws and locks and bolts of rooms that they desire to enter, so as to render the fastenings of no value. I have heard, too, that they bore holes in the doors, which they afterward fill up with putty, so as to put in a wire by means of which the bolt may be drawn."

"I have been out of the room all the evening, so there has been plenty of time for any rascal to operate on the door."

With these ideas in his mind MacMurphy gave the door a most careful examination, but everything was all right; neither bolt nor lock had been tampered with; the screws were solid, in fact, rusted in their places.

"I will make assurance doubly sure, though!" the senator declared, and then he barricaded the door with the old device, which many a time has rendered useless all the skill and cunning of the professional hotel thief.

He tilted a chair up against the door and put the wash-bowl on it in such a way that the slightest attempt to open the door would send the wash-bowl tumbling to the ground, thus making racket enough to wake the soundest sleeper.

"There!" exclaimed MacMurphy, surveying his work with a great deal of satisfaction. "I think my castle is pretty well fortified!"

Then his eyes fell upon a huge, old-fashioned wardrobe—a solid mahogany affair, that was placed midway of the side wall.

"Hello, I didn't notice that before," he observed. "That is an old-timer, and I fancy there would be plenty of room inside of it for a man to conceal himself, so I will just take a look at it, although the idea is ridiculous, of course, but that darned Judge Waldron with his chaff has really got me a wee bit nervous."

There was a large drawer at the bottom of the wardrobe, then, above it, was a large open space for hanging clothes, to which double doors gave access.

There was a lock on the wardrobe, but no key, and it was unlocked, so that the senator was enabled to examine it.

It was empty, although as MacMurphy had remarked, there was plenty of room inside for a man to conceal himself.

So determined was the senator upon making a complete examination, that he even opened the drawer at the bottom of the wardrobe, though only a small boy could have squeezed into it.

"I haven't looked under the bed yet," MacMurphy muttered, with a smile. "I shall probably find the Bad Man there."

But he did not, and then the senator sat down on a chair by the bedside and cogitated for a few moments.

"Well, I think I have covered all the points and succeeded in making an ass of myself as completely as any one could wish," he remarked.

"And it goes to show how a man can be influenced by idle talk sometimes. Now, being satisfied, I will go to bed."

MacMurphy removed his coat, but when he came to his vest, in the breast pocket of which was the wallet, containing the fifty thousand dollars, after getting it off, he hesitated for a moment.

"Let me see, I think I will let the pocketbook stay just where it is, fold the vest up and put it under my pillow in company with my watch and revolver."

And this was the disposition that he made of it, then he finished dressing, put on his night-shirt, blew out his candle and got into bed.

Although the candle was out, yet the room was so well illuminated by the moonlight, which streamed in at the side windows, that all objects were distinctly visible.

Although the senator had come some distance that day, and by that most tiresome of vehicles, an old-fashioned stage-coach, much the worse for wear, and whose springs sadly needed attention, so that he ought to have been tired, yet after going to bed he found that it was not possible for him to get to sleep, his mind being excited.

"Confound the judge and the mayor, and Van Orden with their blamed superstitions!" he muttered as he tossed from side to side uneasily, seeking to find the sleep that came not.

"They have got me excited, so I suppose I will stay awake half the night!"

"That moonlight too—I ought to have drawn the curtain down; I suppose that helps to keep me awake."

But, somehow, he did not feel like getting up to do it.

"I will get even with those fellows in the morning!" he murmured. "It will be a long time before I let up on them in regard to this business."

"The judge don't take any stock in it, of course; it is some of his infernal funny business, but I will get square with him."

Then the senator proceeded to try the well-worn devices for inducing sleep. He counted until he was tired, and the more he counted the less inclined he seemed to be for sleep.

Then he tried to imagine he saw a flock of sheep jumping through a gap in a stone wall into an adjoining field.

"One sheep, over he goes, two sheep, over, three sheep, over—" he muttered, and at last, after a good hour, he fell asleep, but his slumbers were uneasy ones and disturbed by dreams, nothing tangible, but exciting and all mixed up.

For about two hours the senator slept, and then a dream came to him which seemed so real, and so horrible, that he awoke with a start to find the cold perspiration streaming from every pore.

He dreamed that the old mahogany wardrobe had suddenly become endowed with life.

It left its position by the wall and with a sort of stately and dignified dance, like some ancient dame treading the measures of a minuet, came toward the bed, and when it arrived there, it slowly bent over his prostrate form, and the idea at once flashed upon him that he was to be crushed to death beneath the weight of the ponderous piece of furniture.

Was it a wonder that from such a dream the senator awoke with his heart beating like a trip-hammer?

His first glance was at the old wardrobe, so vivid was the remembrance of the vision, although, of course, he now knew that it was nothing but a dream.

The moonlight was not quite so bright, for the moon had moved round to the front of the house,

but still it came into the apartment enough so that MacMurphy could see plainly.

The senator was lying flat on his back—a position, as experience has proved, most productive of ugly dreams of the nightmare order—and the changing of the moon had thrown the head of the bed in the shadow.

Then, as the senator, without moving to denote that he was awake, stared at the wardrobe, mentally speculating how long a man would be likely to live crushed beneath such a piece of furniture, to his amazement he fancied he saw the door of the wardrobe open slightly, just as if some one within was peering out, for the purpose of ascertaining whether he was asleep or awake.

"Oh, this is a delusion!" he murmured, under his breath. "I am getting as nervous as a woman."

And then, gazing with such intensity of vision that it fairly made his eyes ache, he felt sure the door had been opened.

"I did not close it," he muttered; "not tightly, and it has opened of itself."

But even as he spoke he knew he was attempting to deceive himself, for he distinctly remembered closing the door and turning the knob, which moved a tongue of wood around on the inside, so that it was impossible for the door to open unless the knob was turned.

His breath began to come thick and hard.

He fancied he could perceive a white face, in which were set glittering eyes, peeping out at him through the crack of the door.

The thought of the mysterious Bad Man of the Big Bayou came to him immediately.

Was it possible, then, that he was fated to encounter this strange marauder who had baffled all the men of Caddo?

CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER.

MACMURPHY felt that he could not stand the suspense any longer; he must ascertain the truth or go mad.

It was possible he was the victim of his imagination, or perhaps his eyes were deceiving him.

The door of the wardrobe was not open, although the rays of the moon rendered the room so light that there did not seem as if there could be any doubt in regard to this matter.

In such moments as this the mind of man works quickly, and in an extremely few minutes the senator grasped all the points of the affair.

He had examined the wardrobe before retiring to rest; there was no one concealed in it then, nor in the room; there was no doubt in his mind on this point.

All ways by which any one could gain entrance to the apartment were securely blocked—the windows fastened, the door locked, bolted and barricaded.

From where he lay on the bed he could see that the chair, with the wash-bowl, was still tilted up against the door; it had not been disturbed.

And then through the mind of MacMurphy floated remembrances of old tales which he had read concerning secret doors in the walls, and traps in the floor, by means of which men bent on plunder, or murder, gained access to their victims.

But of course this was ridiculous in this case.

The Planter's Hotel of Caddoville was no old-time mansion wherein secret doors and passages could be found, but a modern-built house, run up as cheaply as possible, after the style of this age of shoddy and sham, a mere shell of a house, and it was certain that the thrifty builder had not wasted any of his lumber in constructing secret passages.

And then from what the senator knew of the guileless old man, Uncle Billy Coffee, it was as certain as anything could be, that the landlord would not lend himself to any underhand work.

On the contrary, the landlord would be sure to do all in his power to protect his guests from harm.

The senator felt that despite his resolution not to allow the stories he had heard concerning the mysterious robber, who was preying upon the people of Caddo parish, to trouble him, the tales had haunted him during his sleep, and now that he was awake served to make him nervous.

It was possible that his vision had deceived him—imagination had taken the place of reality.

One thing was certain, if there was some one concealed in the old wardrobe, all he had to do was to wait, and the intruder would make his appearance.

His revolver was under the pillow, handy to his grip.

When this thought came into his mind he concluded that it would be best for him not to move—not to betray that he was awake until the man concealed in the wardrobe came out.

But MacMurphy was a strong-willed, impetuous man, and it was not many seconds after he decided upon this plan of action before he became so impatient at the suspense that he felt he must brave the danger and ascertain exactly what peril threatened him.

At all risks he must "take the bull by the horns."

But although burning with impatience, he proceeded in a careful and cautious manner.

As he was in the shadow, and had not stirred since waking up, he fancied that there was a chance that the intruder was not aware that he was awake.

It certainly seemed so, from the fact that he was peeping out through the crack of the door, apparently endeavoring to discover if the occupant of the bed was fast in slumber's chain so he could venture out.

So the senator gave utterance to a grunt, and half rolled over, like a man disturbed by a dream.

This maneuver was to enable him to get his hand on the revolver, so he could slip it out from under the pillow without exciting the suspicions of the intruder.

The hand of MacMurphy clutched the handle of the pistol, and a smile of exultation appeared on his face.

"Now, my mysterious stranger, I will speedily give you a dose of leaden pills which will be apy to cure you of this propensity to intrude into gentlemen's apartments at unseemly hours," the senator muttered under his breath, as he proceeded to slip the revolver from under the pillow.

He was extremely careful about the way he performed this operation, for he did not want the intruder to detect what he was about. It was his intention when he got his hand on the hammer to spring up, cocking the weapon as he did so, and "go" for the interloper.

But it was not fated that MacMurphy should carry out this plan without interruption.

The senator's eyes had not deceived him, the door of the wardrobe was ajar and a pair of eager orbs were peering out.

And skillfully as MacMurphy simulated sleep it did not deceive the watcher within the wardrobe.

The intruder suspected that the senator was shamming and guessed that he was endeavoring to get out his revolver, and so he took immediate action.

The door of the wardrobe was dashed open and out from it came the mysterious marauder, the Bad Man of the Big Bayou, as the fellow had been termed by the imaginative inhabitants of Caddoville.

He was dressed in the awe-inspiring garb which he had worn on his previous plundering expeditions—the black robe with the pointed cowl, and his death-like face, rendered still more ghastly by the contrast with the black beard, looked really horrible as he sprung across the room in the moonlight.

In his hand he brandished the peculiar sausagelike club which he had used with such telling effect upon the head of Judge Waldron.

The senator sat upright in the bed, trying to cock the revolver; and he succeeded in doing it just as the club descended upon his head, and fired the weapon full in the face of the assailant, but with a quick motion of his left arm the robber brushed the weapon to one side, so that the ball passed over his shoulder, and at the same moment he dealt the senator a heavy blow with the sand-club.

But as MacMurphy attempted to dodge the blow when he saw it coming, he did not get the full force of the stroke although it hit him with sufficient violence to stun him.

With wonderful quickness the robber pulled the vest from under the pillow, extracted the wallet containing the fifty thousand dollars from it and retreated to the wardrobe which he entered, closing the door after him.

Of course the moment the report of the revolver-shot woke the echoes, the watchers, who were keeping vigil in their apartment came in haste to see what was the matter.

They banged at the door only a few seconds after the shot was fired.

The senator, being stunned, was unable to answer.

The three waited but for a moment, and then, being men of action, and arguing the worst from the silence within, proceeded to extremes.

"Break in the door!" cried Judge Waldron, and suiting the action to the word, he planted a heavy kick on the door, just by the side of the knob.

Neither lock nor bolt had been calculated to stand such rough treatment as this, and the powerful force exerted by the judge started the screws of the catches, so that a second kick, more vigorous even than the first, burst the door open, and the three rushed into the apartment.

The appearance of MacMurphy, lying sideways on the bed, the revolver beside him, just where it had dropped from his nerveless hand, astonished the new-comers.

They glared around in search of the man who had assaulted their friend.

No one being visible they proceeded to search for him.

They looked under the bed, then into the wardrobe, the door of which was fastened so that the judge had to turn the knob to open it.

The search was not rewarded though by any

discoveries, and as these were the only two places in the apartment where there was room for anything bigger than a mouse to hide, the investigation for a hidden ruffian soon came to an end.

"The fellow has escaped!" Judge Waldron exclaimed. "By one of the windows probably," he added, and then proceeded to examine.

Naturally he went to the side windows first, having noticed on his previous visit to the room that they were without fastenings.

But the sight of the pitcher and decanter perched on the sashes, revealed to him that the senator had been afraid that entrance might be sought through the windows, and therefore had provided a means of alarm, and that the windows had not been raised.

"No one has escaped through either one of these windows!" Waldron declared.

The mayor had anticipated this decision, and the moment he caught sight of the novel preventives against a surprise he rushed to the front windows and pulled up the curtains, but both the sticks were in place, thus plainly revealing that no one had passed out that way.

"What does it mean?" De Grandville cried. "Can it be possible that he has had a fit and fired his revolver without knowing what he was doing?" the banker exclaimed, as the three approached the bedside.

Judge Waldron stooped and picked up MacMurphy's vest, which he had just trodden on.

"Here is MacMurphy's vest, but the wallet is gone!" he said.

"Probably under his pillow," suggested the mayor.

It took only a moment to ascertain that this was not so.

"Gentlemen, I am sadly afraid that the senator has been robed!" the judge announced, with a grave shake of the head.

CHAPTER X. PROBING THE MYSTERY.

"The first thing to be done is to bring our friend to his senses, and then we can learn from him what has happened," Van Orden suggested.

The mayor hurried to the washstand for water and a towel, while the judge drew MacMurphy over to the front of the bed and straightened his limbs.

"It is certainly strange. I don't see any blood, or any marks of a wound, and yet the man is stunned," Waldron remarked.

By this time the inmates of the house had begun to gather in the entry, having been alarmed by the sound of the pistol-shot, most of them in extremely scanty costume, some few with only

"A blanket in the alarm of fear caught up."

In answer to Uncle Billy Coffee's anxious inquiry, the judge explained that they had been aroused by the pistol-shot and had broken in the door—that the senator was insensible, but as there was no mark of a wound to be seen, there wasn't any doubt he would soon revive.

And then the old lawyer added that it would be as well for the people to go back to bed again as they could not be of any assistance.

"Kinder of a fit, I s'pose," the landlord remarked.

"Yes, that is what it seems like," Judge Waldron replied.

Satisfied with this explanation, the group retired, so that the three were free to attend to their friend without being subject to the scrutiny of a gaping crowd.

Under their care the senator's senses returned to him.

First he gazed blankly in their faces as though he did not recognize them, then his eyes wandered around the room.

"Well, old fellow, how do you find yourself?" the judge asked.

MacMurphy rose to a sitting posture, brushed back the hair from his forehead and exclaimed, abruptly:

"Did you catch the infernal scoundrel?"

"No, we haven't caught anybody; we heard the report of a revolver, for we made up our minds to keep watch, although you didn't believe that there was any danger, and when we knocked at your door we could not rouse you, so we broke it in and found you lying insensible, but there wasn't anybody in the room, for we searched it thoroughly."

"Didn't you find the scoundrel in the wardrobe?" the senator asked, pointing to the piece of furniture, the door of which was now wide open, exposing the interior.

"No, no one was in it, and the door was closed, too, when we entered. I left it open. Did you have a visitor?"

"Indeed I did, and I reckon I am fifty thousand dollars worse off for it," MacMurphy replied, his eyes at this moment happening to fall upon the vest which Waldron had placed upon the side of the bed.

Exclamations of astonishment came from the lips of Van Orden and De Grandville, while the judge shook his head.

This disclosure was not unexpected by him.

"Yes, gentlemen, I am fifty thousand dollars worse off than I was last night when I went to

bed," MacMurphy continued. "I laughed at your stories and I will admit that I thought the thing was greatly exaggerated, but I am satisfied now."

Then he related what had occurred.

The others listened with the greatest possible interest.

"It is a fact that your robber is ahead of any man in the line that I ever heard of!" the senator said, in conclusion.

"Well, we must give chase as soon as possible!" the Judge exclaimed. "And while you are dressing we will take another look at the room and see if we can discover how the fellow managed to get out. It is plain enough how he got in."

"Oh, no, that is not easily explained!" the senator declared, as he got out of bed and proceeded to dress himself as speedily as possible! "The fellow did not sneak into the room while I was down-stairs, for I took pains to examine thoroughly before I went to bed, and I am certain he was not in the room then."

"Ah, I had an idea that he had concealed himself in the wardrobe during your absence," the judge remarked.

"Yes, I thought you supposed so, but it is not the truth. How he got into the room is as great a mystery as how he got out of it."

Again the three made a careful examination, even sounded the walls to see if there was such a thing as a secret door, and closely scrutinized the carpet so as to be certain that there was not a trap-door somewhere in the floor.

"I will swear the fellow didn't come out through the door," the old lawyer remarked, "for we were in the entry a second or two after the revolver-shot was fired, and then, too, as we had our door ajar, we would have heard any one passing through the entry, even if we had not got out in time to intercept him."

The banker and mayor agreed to this and were quick in saying so.

It did not take the senator long to don his clothes and by the time he was dressed the others had finished their investigation.

"It isn't of any use to waste time here," MacMurphy declared. "The fellow has gone, and we must see if we cannot get some clew to him on the outside of the house."

The four sallied forth, but the search without was as fruitless as the investigation within had been; not the slightest trace could be discovered, and the friends returned to No. 13, to hold a council of war as the senator remarked.

"Well, gentlemen, I have been taken into camp, and no mistake, this time!" MacMurphy admitted, after they were all seated. "I will never again, as long as I live, make a jest of the superstition concerning the number thirteen, for it has been most certainly an extremely unlucky number for me on this occasion."

"It is as I told you," the mayor remarked. "Men may scoff at such things, the unbelievers, and the men who believe may not be able to give any reason for the faith that is in them, but they have become convinced that there is something in it, although they are not able to explain the matter."

"I am not at all superstitious," Van Orden observed, "yet I must admit that there are some things which the world at large term superstitious which are not easily explained, and there is no doubt that some of the greatest, and wisest men, who have ever lived have taken considerable stock in such matters. Napoleon, for instance: he was a firm believer in his star; and take the Rothschilds, hard-headed, shrewd men of business; it is their rule never to employ a man who has been unsuccessful in business, because they think he carries bad luck with him."

"Oh, yes, I have known any number of men, far-seeing, keen business fellows, who believe in luck," the senator remarked. "And I must say, that, as far as men go, I think myself that there is something in it, for I have known fellows who always seemed to be lucky; no matter what they went into there was money in it for them, everything they touched seemed to turn into gold; and, on the other hand, I have been acquainted with unlucky men—men who really seemed to be under a spell, for no matter what they tried they always failed."

"Now I have always been considered a lucky man, and one thing is sure, I have prospered amazingly and that I suppose is the reason why I was not afraid to take chances on this money, for, most certainly, I had not the slightest fear that any rogue would be smart enough to rob me."

"But this Bad Man is a devil, you know," the judge remarked with a perfectly serious face.

"Oh, is that so?" MacMurphy exclaimed with a decided touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"Yes, yes, that is the opinion of quite a number in the parish of Caddo," Waldron replied.

"Our colored brothers are particularly strong believers, and it has been a good thing too that this fellow has inspired the nigs with such fear that they are afraid to venture out after nightfall unless there is a regular army of them, for now the poultry do not have to roost half so high, and small portable articles do not disappear as they were wont to do."

"Devil or not I will hunt the fellow down if it costs me half my fortune!" the senator declared.

"I am not the man to tamely bear such a loss, and I will do all I can to make the country too hot to hold this disguised scoundrel!"

"The first move I will make will be to offer a reward of ten thousand dollars for the capture of the robber and ten thousand more for the recovery of the money."

The others looked astonished at the declaration.

"That will make twenty thousand dollars," Judge Waldron observed.

"It is a colossal sum!" De Grandville exclaimed.

"I have never heard of such a reward being offered," the banker remarked.

"It is my idea to beat the record," MacMurphy explained. "In such a case as this it is my opinion that there is not any use of offering a small reward. I put the amount so large that it will be a fortune for almost any man, and if it does not start ninety-nine out of every hundred men in the parish on the scent then I am out in my reckoning. Ten thousand for the capture of the robber, dead or alive, and ten thousand for the return of the money, or five thousand for half of it, and in that proportion."

"I fancy, too, the scoundrel will have difficulty in getting rid of the funds, for the money is in all new, crisp, one-thousand-dollar bills, First National Bank of New Orleans issue, and I believe that thousand-dollar bills are not common in Caddo parish."

"You are right, they are not!" the judge assented, and the rascal will have trouble in getting rid of the notes."

"Yes, and I will flood the whole Southwest with warnings, so that if any man attempts to change a new thousand-dollar note anywhere, he will be immediately regarded with suspicion," MacMurphy remarked.

CHAPTER XI.

VAN ORDEN DEPARTS.

"The idea is an excellent one," exclaimed Judge Waldron. "And I would not confine the warning to the Southwest alone, but, if I were you, I would take pains to notify every bank and money-changer in the country."

"I will."

"Have you the numbers of the bills?" the judge asked.

"No, I have not; but, no doubt, I can get the numbers at the bank," MacMurphy replied.

"Well, I would ascertain whether you can or not as soon as possible," the lawyer remarked. "In this game the Bad Man has most certainly taken the first trick; he has got the money, and now you must do all in your power to fix it so that the money will not be of any use to him."

"Ah, yes, but that will be very difficult to do," Van Orden observed, with a shake of the head.

"You must bear in mind, my friends, that bank bills are not like bonds or stock certificates," the banker continued. "The fact that the denomination of the bills is so large is a point in your favor, but it will be almost an impossibility to warn every bank and money-changer in the world in regard to the stolen property, even if you succeed in ascertaining the numbers of the bills."

"United States notes pass readily in all the great money centers of the world; and another point you must take into consideration, too: according to my experience, in all great money centers there exist, and flourish, crooked men, who for a good round sum, will undertake to get rid of stolen property of this kind, even when it is in the shape of bonds and stock certificates, and most certainly they would jump at the chance of disposing of plunder so easily negotiated as thousand-dollar bank bills, changing one at a time, so as not to excite suspicion."

The others nodded, as much as to say that they admitted the soundness of the banker's argument.

"Then too, while for a time, by spending money freely, you can succeed in keeping this matter before the public," Van Orden added, "yet in the course of a year or two in the whirl of business it will be sure to pass out of men's minds and the particulars will be forgotten so all the robber has to do is to wait and he will not have much trouble in getting rid of the money."

"That is correct; there is no disputing the strength of Van Orden's position," Judge Waldron observed. "So, under the circumstances, the best thing you can do is to make all possible efforts to catch the rascal as quickly as you can."

The enormous reward that the senator intends to offer will unquestionably set everybody on the alert," the mayor remarked.

"It is not every day in the year that an opportunity is offered for a man to make from ten to twenty thousand dollars. I have no doubt that it will set the whole State in an uproar."

"Oh, yes, that is certain!" the senator declared.

"And it is my intention to give the matter the most thorough advertising too. I will get out hand-bills and circulate them all through this district, besides advertising in the newspapers; then too I will warn every bank, banker and all the chief police officials in the country, and the fact that there is a chance for some man to grasp twenty thousand dollars will be certain to cause every one to be on the alert."

"Well, I don't want to throw cold water on your glowing anticipations," the judge remarked, "but I must observe that in my opinion, you have got a mighty difficult job ahead of you."

"You must remember that I have been through this mill myself, although I did not conduct operations on so grand a scale as you propose to work; yet I hustled around pretty lively and kicked up considerable of a fuss, but only had my labor for pains. The fact is this fellow is an uncommonly smart rascal and how he ever came to be developed in a moral district like Caddo parish, far from a big city, always the hot-bed of crime is a mystery."

"Yes, it is rather odd, for from the way the fellow works it is quite evident that, as you say, he is a scoundrel of the first water," MacMurphy observed.

"Yes, such a rascal as might be produced in New York, London or Paris," Van Orden remarked.

"Very true, and the wonder is that he should make his appearance in an isolated country district," De Granville suggested.

"There is no getting around the fact that he is a master thief, as the Germans say!" the judge declared. "As I remarked, when we were speaking of the man before supper, we have our share of rascals here in Caddo parish, but they are all common, low-scoundrels. There is not a man Jack of them all capable of working a game of this kind, for the fellow displays so much ingenuity in doing the business that it is evident he is a man of brains."

The others assented to this, and then they fell to discussing what was to be done.

The copy for the handbill was prepared, and as there was no printing office in Caddoville, Van Orden said he would take it to Jonesville in the morning.

Caddoville was not on the telegraph line either, so it was not possible to use the electric wire to warn the outside world of the robbery until some one went to Jonesville.

"I reckon I had better go with you to Jonesville," the senator said.

"Oh, no, there isn't any real necessity for it, the banker replied. "You can give me instructions and I will see that they are carried out to the letter."

"I should think, senator, that it would be better for you to remain on the ground here so as to direct the pursuit," Judge Waldron remarked. "Van Orden can attend to the telegraphing."

And so it was decided that the banker should take the stage to Jonesville which left at twelve o'clock, high noon.

By the time that breakfast was ready all was arranged, and as it would take three or four days to get the handbills up from Jonesville, a half a dozen written copies were made of the original, so that they could be put up in prominent places immediately.

After breakfast was over the landlord was informed of what had taken place during the night and his astonishment was great.

At first he thought that Judge Waldron was trying to "fool" him, as he termed it; the old lawyer having a wide reputation as a practical joker, but finally it was made plain to him that there wasn't any joke about the matter.

"Durn me if that don't beat all that I ever heerd tell on!" he declared.

And this declaration of Uncle Billy was repeated by the whole town when the news of the robbery was made public.

So great was the excitement created by it that about all business was suspended and the citizens flocked to the hotel to discuss the matter.

The enormous reward offered caused many a stare, and parties were at once organized to scour the surrounding country for the purpose of seeing if some trace of the robber could not be found.

The amount of the reward was so great that many doubted, and thought there must be some mistake about the matter, and it was not until they had a personal interview with MacMurphy that they became satisfied that twenty thousand dollars really awaited the man, or men, who should be lucky enough to capture the robber and recover the money.

By nine o'clock Caddoville was almost depopulated of all its able-bodied citizens and a good many who were not able-bodied, for even men who had not been well enough to do a stroke of work for years, shouldered a gun and joined in the search.

Van Orden departed in the morning stage for Jonesville.

This stage-line was an extremely primitive affair, only consisting of a single four-seated hack and two pairs of horses, which were use

on alternate trips, the stage making three round trips a week.

There was not much travel over the line, and this meager equipment answered.

Van Orden was the only passenger, and having the coach to himself, was able to enjoy his reflections without danger of interruption.

"A bad business—a very bad business," he declared, with a solemn shake of the head, after the coach had been under way for a couple of hours.

The banker had reflected over the matter so intensely that he could not help discussing it with himself.

"I am very much afraid that MacMurphy will not see his fifty thousand dollars again," he continued.

"From the way in which the robbery was executed, it is plain that the scoundrel is a remarkably clever rascal.

"Now, these precautions that we are taking may prevent him from using the money, but that is no guarantee that MacMurphy will get it again.

"If he had only taken my advice, this loss would not have happened; but he is one of the obstinate kind, and as he has been uncommonly lucky he fancies he knows a little more than anybody else. This affair may be a lesson to him, but some men are not apt scholars. What bothers me is how the deuce the robber learned that the senator had the money! Or was he ignorant of the fact, and just went on the chance that MacMurphy would be well-heeled, financially?"

Van Orden, although busy in meditation, did not fail to see that the coach was gradually slackening its pace; and just as he made up his mind to speak to the driver about it, and request him to push on as fast as possible as he was in a hurry, the hack came to a standstill.

CHAPTER XII.

A PUZZLE.

THE banker immediately opened the window and popped his head out.

He was in such a state of mind that he was prepared for almost anything.

His first impression was that the stage had been "held up" by road-agents; not that such a thing was at all common in that section of the country, for it was not, but, as we have said, he was excited and ready to imagine the worst.

Not that he had much to fear from a visit of these light-fingered gentlemen, for, like a prudent man, he carried but little money with him.

His jewelry, too, would not afford any robber much delight, for all he wore was a plain silver watch, with a silk guard, and a small seal ring.

But his fear was unfounded; no masked men blocking the road, with rifles leveled at the coach, met his eyes.

All he saw was the driver, who had dismounted from his box, and was standing by the side of his horses, swearing at a fearful rate.

"What is the matter?" Van Orden asked.

"Blame me if I know!" the driver replied.

This driver was a noted character; James Manning was his name, but being tall and slenderly built, the nickname of Slim Jim had been affixed to him, and he was rarely called anything else.

He was a good driver and an excellent horseman, although a terribly hard drinker, but being of the tough, Southwestern stock, it took a deal of liquor to affect him, and, in fact, it was a common remark in Caddo parish that Slim Jim, as a rule, was a better driver when drunk than when sober.

After the banker made the discovery that the stage had not come to a halt on account of marauders, he immediately jumped to the conclusion that, as the French say, "it is the unexpected that always happens," Slim Jim at last dallied with the rich juice of the corn until it had overcome him.

A second glance showed Van Orden, though, that this was not so.

The driver was swearing away with an ease and fluency that no drunken man could hope to attain.

"Why have you stopped?" the banker demanded.

"Because we can't go on."

"Why not?"

"Somethin' the matter with the horses."

"Well, what is the matter?"

"Didn't I tell you that I didn't know?" the driver exclaimed. "Wot do you want to go to poking fool questions like that at me, Bunker Van Orden? If I knew wot ailed the beasts, don't yer s'pose I would do wot I could for them?"

"Yes, yes, of course," the banker replied, soothingly, and then he alighted from the coach and joined the driver.

"They seemed all right when we started, and from the way they trotted off, I reckoned we would make Jonesville on time, and without half-trying, but now they have pulled up dead lame."

"When did you first notice that there was anything the matter with them?"

"Only 'bout ten minutes ago; the fact is, you see I have been taking a leetle snooze," the driver explained. "I was up with the gang last night playing poker, and we were at it all night, so that I only got 'bout an hour's sleep, so I kinder snoozed off until we got on the road."

"It is all good going, you know, and the horses know the way jest as well as I do, but when they commenced to slacken their pace, I woke up, and I see'd right away that something was wrong."

"I put the gad onto 'em, thinking, mebbe, that it was only laziness, but jest as soon as I got my eyes wide open I see'd that both on 'em were lame."

"It is very strange," Van Orden remarked, a certain suspicion beginning to creep into his mind. "Have you examined the horses to see if there is anything the matter with them?"

"Wa-al, no, I haven't, for I reckoned that they had kinder sprained themselves some way, but, mebbe they have picked up a stone in the road."

Acting on this idea, Slim Jim examined the hoofs of the steeds, and by so doing made a discovery which caused him to swear more frightfully than ever.

Both horses had been tampered with, a thin nail having been driven into the hoof in such a way that the action of the steeds in trotting would in time produce lameness.

"Wa-al, now, durn my gizzard! if that ain't the meanest trick that I ever had played on me!" the driver exclaimed.

Van Orden's face was dark and thoughtful.

The moment he made the discovery that the horses had gone lame, the suspicion had entered his mind that they had been tampered with; it was a cunning trick to delay him on his journey—to keep back for a few hours the intelligence of the robbery which would be immediately flashed to the world at large the moment he could get at the telegraph in Jonesville.

As the reader will perceive, this was an extremely far-fetched supposition, but Van Orden had arrived at that state when he was ready to believe almost anything.

What possible difference a few hours could make he could not have very well explained, but for all that he was certain in his own mind that he was the victim of an extremely cunningly-contrived plot.

"Can the horses go on now do you think?" the banker asked, anxiously.

"Nary time!" Slim Jim responded, emphatically. "These byer beasts will have to be laid up for a while. I reckon you will have to stay byer while I go on with them to old man Smith's; they kin manage to hobble along thar, but it would be tough on 'em to expect 'em to draw the hack."

"I kin git a pair of mules from Smith—that is all the stock he keeps—and they will tote us inter Jonesville."

"We will be three or four hours late."

"No, not more'n a couple, I reckon; I will do the best I kin, and I tell yer wot it is, Bunker Van Orden, I will jest have bloody vengeance on the man wot played this trick on me."

"Ahl you have a suspicion then as to who it is?" Van Orden cried, earnestly.

"Yes, sir-e-e! I reckon I kin put my hooks onto the man!"

"Who is it?"

"That low-down, no-account Johnny Buckner!"

"I do not know the man—is he a rascal?"

"Wa-al, he would be if he had brains enuff. Some sich mean trick as this byer is 'bout all he is equal to."

"He was fooling 'round the poker-table last night, and seein' as how I was playing in big luck he boned me for a stake, but I wouldn't let him have it, 'cos it would jest be throwing good money away to waste it on a galoot like him. He couldn't make nothing at poker, nohow, even if he had a national bank at his back. When he found that I wouldn't stake him he got sassy and I up and boosted him out of the room, tellin' him never to dar' to show his face whar gen'lemen were sitting down to play cards ag'in'. He 'lowed he gits squar with me somehow, and I reckon that this byer is his work."

Van Orden was disappointed; this was not the tale he expected to hear at all, and although he did not take the trouble to say so, yet in his own mind he was sure that the driver was wrong.

This was no trick played by a village loafer in order to "get square" for an injury.

No, indeed! It was a carefully prepared plan to detain him—to keep him from getting to Jonesville on time.

The stage was due there about four in the afternoon, but now on account of this delay it was doubtful if he would get in until after supper, perhaps not until seven or eight o'clock, a bad hour to reach the business world by telegraph.

And now the banker was sorry that he had waited for the stage; he wished he had procured a horse and ridden over.

But it was too late now; he must have patience.

So, after the driver departed with the horses, Van Orden sat down upon a tree-trunk by the

roadside, a big oak which had been overcome by the fury of the lightning; luckily he had his cigar case with him, and it was well supplied with choice weeds, so he lit a cigar and prepared himself to pass the time away as comfortably as possible.

"I never thought to ask how far it was to old man Smith's," Van Orden mused, "but from the way in which the driver spoke, I should judge that it was not far, so, in an hour or two, at the latest, he ought to be back."

But it was a good four hours before Slim Jim made his appearance, and by this time the banker was fairly boiling over with impatience.

"Had the durnest time you ever see'd!" the driver exclaimed, as soon as he came within speaking distance.

"I reckon you thought I was never coming, for sure!"

"Well, I couldn't imagine what had detained you."

"Had an awful time; some one of Smith's fool niggers opened the corral and let all the mules out and we had an awful time hunting 'em down in the cane!" the driver announced.

"Smith would have killed the nig if he could have found out who did it; but the darks all stuck to one another, and swore no one had been nigh the corral."

Again Van Orden's brow grew dark.

His vivid imagination saw in this corral incident another proof that some one was at work to delay him on his way to the telegraph.

The negroes were right; no one of them had opened the gates of the corral.

The mules were hitched to the hack and again the vehicle went on its way.

Slim Jim pushed on as fast as possible but it was after dark when Jonesville was reached.

The telegraph office was closed.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER OBSTACLE.

BUT the fact that the telegraph office was not open did not worry the banker at all.

He knew where the operator boarded and felt certain that if he hunted the young man up and explained matters to him the telegrapher would be willing to reopen the office.

It was an illustration of the old rule that "kissing goes by favor." The operator would be willing to oblige the leading banker of the section when he would have laughed at the idea of reopening his office to accommodate any ordinary individual.

It was as Van Orden expected. When he got speech with the young man, and explained what he wanted, the operator expressed his pleasure at being able to be of service.

The two proceeded to the depot which was also under the charge of the young man, for as is usually the case in small, unimportant stations, one man was depot-master, telegraph operator, baggage and switch-man, all combined.

"I presume there will not be any difficulty in opening communication with New Orleans," the banker remarked, as the operator seated himself at his instrument.

"Oh, no, in an important center like New Orleans, the office is open night and day. The only trouble will be to reach the bank people, so as to get the information you require. The chief of police and the city officials we can get at without any trouble."

The mayor of the city of New Orleans was a particular friend of Senator MacMurphy and therefore there was no doubt that he would do all in his power to aid in the recovery of the stolen property.

As the operator explained to the banker the telegraph went on a rather roundabout way to New Orleans.

From Jonesville the line extended to Marshall, Texas, from there to Galveston, in the same State, and then from Galveston to New Orleans.

"Everything is in our favor until we reach Galveston," the operator observed to the banker. "At a late hour like this the line is clear and we will not have any difficulty in getting Galveston, but there may be some slight delay between that point and New Orleans, but nothing to what there would be in the daytime."

"Yes, I see," Van Orden remarked.

Then the young man proceeded to "call" Galveston.

As it happened this operator was not a particularly good one; he was a new man and not capable of taking charge of a more important office than one like Jonesville.

He commenced operations, Van Orden watching him anxiously, and after a few touches of the key the banker perceived from the expression upon the face of the young man that something was wrong.

"What is the trouble?" he inquired, anxiously.

"Well, I don't exactly know," the operator replied, shaking his head in an extremely doubtful manner. "The line is out of order, but what the trouble is I cannot say."

The face of the banker grew dark, for to his mind came the thought that the robber or his allies had again been at work.

He felt sure that the lameness of the horses,

which had delayed the stage-coach that morning, was not the result of accident, and now, that the telegraph was out of order, he at once came to the conclusion that it was the work of the same hands which had disabled the horses.

The operator worked at the key for a few moments more and then leaned back in his chair, disgusted.

"It is of no use!" he exclaimed. "I cannot do anything with it!"

"What do you think is the trouble—is it the instrument or the wires?"

"Oh, the wire is down along the line somewhere, the instrument is all right."

The shade on the banker's brow darkened, for the statement seemed to confirm his suspicions.

"What is to be done?" he asked.

"I am sure I don't know," the young man replied.

"Do you think it is a break in the wire?"

"Well, it is either that or the line has grounded."

"You are not able to decide which?"

"No, that is a touch above me; I am not good enough operator to decide in regard to a point of that kind," the young man admitted, frankly.

"We will not be able to get at New Orleans to-night then?"

"No, not until the trouble is removed."

"How will that be done?"

"Marshall will attend to it as soon as it is discovered that the line is out of order," the operator explained. "Marshall, being an important point, has a gang of repairers, and when it is found out there that something is the matter with the line, the gang will start immediately to put it in order."

"Yes, yes, I see, they come down along the track, of course."

"Certainly, on a hand-car."

"Ah, yes, I understand, and I presume that if we took a hand-car and went up the road, we could discover what is the matter?"

The operator looked a little surprised at the suggestion, but remarked:

"Oh, yes, we could find out as well as anybody, of course; that is if we went to where the trouble is—far enough, you know, for it may be quite close to Marshall."

"Yes, possibly, and then it may be possible that it is only a few miles from Jonesville."

"Very true."

"My curiosity is strongly excited and I think I should like to make a trip; you have a hand-car here?"

"Oh, yes," responded the railroad man, extremely astonished at this strange whim on the part of the banker.

"If you could arrange the matter I should feel extremely obliged. Of course, I am willing to pay liberally for the service. I presume we will not incur any danger in making the trip."

"Oh, no, no danger, the road is clear; no train until morning."

"If you will kindly attend to the matter I shall be much obliged, and, as I said before, I will pay liberally for the service. I know that this is rather an odd idea of mine, and when a man takes an odd notion in his head he ought to be willing to pay for it."

"Oh, it will not be particularly expensive," the agent remarked. "All we want is four stout men to work the hand-car."

"The trip will be rather a pleasant one, I should imagine, for the moon is coming up so we will have ample light."

"Yes, sir, but I am afraid you may be disappointed, for the break may be too far off for us to reach it, and then, if we succeed in finding it, if the wire is broken I will not be able to repair it; if it is only grounded, I can."

"Well, we will take a run out for a few miles, anyway," Van Orden observed.

It was his opinion that the trouble would be found within a few miles of Jonesville, but he did not think it necessary to tell the agent so, for he did not desire to enter into any explanation about the matter.

It did not take long for the railroad man to hunt up four stout fellows to work the hand-car, and soon the party were on the way.

Along the iron rails they sped, the operator and Van Orden keeping their eyes upon the telegraph wire.

There was only a single wire upon the poles, for the telegraphic business in the far Southwest is not extensive.

On went the car; mile after mile was covered, until six were passed, and then, in an open space, in a heavy wood, through which the line ran, the searchers after knowledge made the discovery that the wire was down.

The hand-car was immediately stopped and an investigation begun.

Van Orden had had the forethought to request the railroad agent to bring along a couple of lanterns, so the darkness cast by the trees, only partially dispelled by the rays of the moon, did not much impede the investigation.

It did not take long for the pair to discover what had occurred.

A piece of wire, about fifty feet long, had been cut out of the line and carried away; there was no other conclusion to be arrived at, for

the wire was not to be found in the vicinity, although the pair searched diligently for it.

"Some scoundrel who has a grudge against the railroad company has done this!" the operator exclaimed.

"Yes, it may be something of that kind," Van Orden assented, but in his heart he knew better.

The scoundrel who had done the mischief was the mysterious robber, the Bad Man of the Big Bayou, and the object was to prevent the news of the stealing of MacMurphy's fifty thousand dollars from being given to the public until the following day.

"How long will it take the men to repair the line," Van Orden asked, as he and the agent resumed their seats upon the hand-car and the homeward journey was begun.

"They will get at it as soon as the discovery is made that the line is out of order," the agent replied.

"But it is not probable that they will begin to-night?"

"No, hardly, but they will the first thing in the morning. By noon the line ought to be in order again."

"Advise me the moment it is possible to get a message to New Orleans," Van Orden said.

The operator promised to do so, and again expressed the opinion that the line would be all right by noon of the next day.

CHAPTER XIV.

QUICK WORK.

THE banker retired to his couch in a decidedly uncomfortable state of mind.

So far he had been baffled at every point, but he consoled himself with the thought that in the morning he would get to work all right, for the mysterious outlaw had done about all that it was possible for him to do.

Fatigued by his exertions Van Orden slept late on the following morning and it was after nine when he reached his office.

His clerks were at their posts, and when the banker took a seat in his private office his managing man came in to report.

"We contrived to do considerable business yesterday," he remarked.

"That is good."

"We got rid of all the Government bonds we had on hand, ten thousand dollars' worth. Sold them to an old planter from up the river who has been hoarding up his money and just got the idea into his head that he might just as well let his cash earn a little money for him."

"Sensible man!"

"Yes, he was an odd, old customer; acted as if he hadn't been off his plantation for years—paid for the bonds in thousand-dollar bills."

The banker started as though he had received a galvanic shock.

"Eh, what is that?" he exclaimed.

"I said that he paid for the bonds in thousand-dollar bills," the managing man explained, somewhat astonished at the effect which his words had produced upon Van Orden.

"One-thousand-dollar bills?"

"Yes, ten of them, all on the First National Bank of New Orleans."

It was as much as the banker could do to keep from crying out, for he felt certain that this ten thousand dollars, in one-thousand-dollar bills, was part of the money wrested from Senator MacMurphy by his nocturnal visitor.

"Let me see the bills," Van Orden said, after reflecting about the matter for a few minutes.

"Oh, they are all right," the assistant declared, falling into the error of thinking that his employer had a suspicion that the bills were not good. "I will fetch them."

Van Orden soon had the bills in his hands, and he examined them as carefully as though he thought that the bits of printed paper would be able to give him some valuable information.

The managing man watched him anxiously, for although he prided himself upon his acuteness in detecting bad money, yet the peculiar manner in which the banker acted made him fearful lest he had been caught by a dangerous counterfeit."

"They are all right, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, put them away," and Van Orden heaved a sigh as he gave them into the hands of his assistant, much to the astonishment of that gentleman who had never known the banker to act so queerly before.

The managing man then explained in detail the transactions which had taken place during the banker's absence, Van Orden listening like a man in a maze, evidently paying but little attention to the words of the other.

He was in a brown study; the explanation of what had taken place during his absence interested him not; he was striving with all his power to decide what he had better do in regard to the MacMurphy affair.

Suddenly a bright idea came into his mind.

There was a train for Marshall at ten o'clock. Would it not be a good idea for him to take that train and go to Marshall, without waiting for the telegraph to be put in order?"

He decided, after turning the thought over in his mind for a moment or two, that it would be the best thing he could do.

His assistant could attend to the printing of

the handbills and at Marshall he could use the telegraph.

Briefly then he explained what had taken place and gave orders in regard to what was to be done.

The assistant listened with the most profound astonishment.

Now he comprehended why the banker was anxious to see the bills.

"Do you think, sir, that there was anything crooked about this old planter?" he asked.

"I am afraid so, and if these bills should happen to turn out to be Senator MacMurphy's property we are ten thousand dollars out, although we are innocent holders for value; but, under the circumstances, I would not for a moment think of retaining the money if I was satisfied that it was MacMurphy's."

"Yes, yes, certainly, I understand that. I am sadly afraid that the old planter was a fraud and I will do my best to get on his track."

To settle this point, so that we will not have to refer to it again, we will state that although the managing man searched high and low he could not find any trace of the odd old planter.

There were plenty of people who had seen the man ride into the town and ride out of it; being a stranger, it was natural that he should attract attention and be commented upon; but, after getting out of Jonesville, the old man had disappeared as completely as though he had flown up into the sky or gone down into the earth.

Van Orden took the train for Marshall, where he arrived in due time.

His first visit was to the telegraph-office, where, in answer to his anxious inquiry, he received the welcome intelligence that the wires were all right and he could reach New Orleans without difficulty.

After sending his dispatches, Van Orden proceeded to interview his friends, the bankers of the town. There were three in Marshall—two banks and one private banker.

Van Orden was a shrewd man, and during the run to Marshall he had been doing considerable thinking.

The fact that the mysterious robber had succeeded in getting rid of ten thousand dollars' worth of his plunder in Jonesville, had caused the thought to come into his mind that it was probable the robber had cut the telegraph-wire so as to prevent the news of the robbery from reaching Marshall until he had a chance to get rid of some of his booty in that town.

So, when Van Orden called upon his banker friends, he did not say anything about MacMurphy's loss, but asked how business was, and mentioned as an odd fact that an old planter had come in and purchased ten thousand dollars' worth of Government bonds on the previous day.

We will not weary the reader with the dry details of the conversation, but as Van Orden had suspected, the old planter had also paid Marshall a visit.

He had arrived in town just after the banks opened for business that morning.

At the three places he had succeeded in getting thirty thousand dollars' worth of gold in exchange for thirty one-thousand-dollar bills, paying a small premium to the bankers for the accommodation.

At each place the man had told the same story. He had sold his plantation, getting ten thousand dollars in cash for it, but was "afraid of the durned rag money," and wanted the "solid old stuff."

Of course, none of the bankers had any idea that the man had visited any other money-changer in the town.

After learning these facts, Van Orden began to get excited.

The man had only a few hours' start, and it really seemed as if there might be some chance of catching him.

The banker hurried to the chief of police and told his story.

The enormous reward offered at once appealed to the cupidity of this worthy. He declared that he would spare no pains to catch the rascal, and broadly intimated that, in his opinion, there was not much doubt he would succeed.

The astonishment of the bankers was great when they learned of the robbery, and of Van Orden's suspicions; but, unlike that gentleman, they were not particular friends of Senator MacMurphy, and were not troubled with uneasy consciences in regard to the money.

They had given value for the thousand-dollar bills, and were not disposed to give them up and stand the loss, even if it was proven that the bills were MacMurphy's property.

When the news of the robbery became public property, and in a small town like Marshall it did not take long for the news to spread throughout the place, the majority of the citizens, stimulated by the large reward, enlisted in the search, in addition to the regular police force.

But although the rogue had but a few hours' start, none of the pursuers succeeded in getting on his track.

It was the Caddoville and Jonesville experience over again. No trace could be discovered of the man after he got out of the town.

In due time answers came to Van Orden's dispatches.

The bank officials were not able to give the numbers of the bills furnished to MacMurphy. They had paid out a number of one-thousand-dollar bills to their customers, and owing to the negligence of one of their clerks, now an absconder, no record had been kept.

The answers from the mayor and chief of police were more cheering. Both protested that they would do all in their power to aid MacMurphy, and the mayor said he had induced one of the most celebrated detectives in the country to undertake the case, the famous L. Hand of Arkansas, so widely known for his good work in the Government Secret Service. He happened to be in New Orleans, and had started for Caddoville at the mayor's instigation.

This was cold comfort, Van Orden thought. Little chance was there, in his opinion, that this stranger would be able to do anything.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

In two days Van Orden was back again in Caddoville, and great was Senator MacMurphy's disgust when he learned what had taken place.

"By Jove! I tell you what it is, Van Orden, this fellow is really a marvelous rascal!" he declared. "He is no common scoundrel—no miserable, petty thief, but away at the top of the heap."

"Well, how have you got on here?" the banker asked.

"Have not got on at all," MacMurphy replied. "As the old poet says, 'the best advancement we can boast of is that we have not gone backward,'" Judge Waldron remarked.

Van Orden had found the banker in the lawyer's office.

"No trace, then?" the banker said.

"Not a trace," the senator responded. "The fellow has succeeded in avoiding all search, although the country for forty miles around has been thoroughly scoured."

"The prevailing impression in this neighborhood is that the scoundrel has fled to other parts," Judge Waldron observed. "Acting on that supposition, we have caused diligent inquiry to be made, but have not been able to discover that anybody is missing."

"It is possible that this Government Secret Service detective, whom the mayor speaks of in his dispatch, may be able to get on the fellow's track," Van Orden remarked.

MacMurphy shook his head in a doubtful sort of way.

"Well, I cannot say that I take much stock in these detectives," he replied. "As far as my experience goes they are a poor lot. They do an immense amount of bragging, but are not particularly successful in catching rascals unless they are common fellows, who, in nine cases out of ten, haven't sense enough to hold their tongues."

"That is true; as a rule the rogue catches himself, so to speak," the judge commented.

The conversation continued for some time, the three indulging in all sorts of speculations in regard to what ought to be done, but as no definite, practical plan was arrived at we will not take up time by detailing their words.

For a week the search was kept up with wonderful strictness, every swamp and thicket within thirty miles of Caddoville being examined in hopes of finding some secret hiding-place where the robber lay in concealment.

The search was a fruitless one though, and by the time that the week was up even MacMurphy and Judge Waldron became converts to the belief that the robber had fled.

"I don't exactly understand his game though," the old lawyer remarked, discussing the matter with MacMurphy, the mayor and the banker. "If the fellow determined to clear out—make his way to Mexico for instance, where there would not be any danger of his being apprehended—why did he take the trouble to change his thousand-dollar bills into gold?"

This was a riddle which none of the others felt capable of answering.

"The bond business I can understand," Judge Waldron continued. "It was just as easy for him to carry the bonds as the bills, but thirty thousand dollars in gold is considerable of a burden, and why the scoundrel wanted to trouble himself with so much coin is a mystery."

The others assented to this.

"Now it looks to me as if this was a proof that the man did not intend to leave the country, for if he did the gold would be in his way, and I am assuming that this fellow is too smart a rogue to make any mistake about a thing of this kind."

"Coin can be easily hidden away, buried in the earth, for instance, where it can remain without being damaged for years."

The others nodded.

"Now it seems to me that the fact of the fellow going to the trouble of getting the gold is a pretty good proof that he is not going to leave the country."

"He can use the gold without exciting any suspicion, and the greater part of it he can bury until this trouble blows over."

"Of course, we cannot keep up this search

forever, and then, when the hue and cry dies out, he can dig up his treasure and use it."

This reasoning seemed correct and again the search was prosecuted with a vast amount of vigor, but without the searchers being rewarded with a single clew.

On the morning of the day that followed the one on which this conversation took place, the senator was in the hotel-office, conversing with the landlord, when a tall, muscularly-built stranger rode up, tied his horse to one of the posts without and entered the hotel.

He was plainly and substantially dressed, having the appearance of a well-to-do planter.

He was a man of thirty, or thereabouts, with a good face, and the appearance of a gentleman.

The firm chin showed resolution and he carried himself in such a way that an expert in such matters would have quickly come to the conclusion that he had seen service in the tented field.

"How are you?" he said, with a nod to the landlord, walking to where Uncle Billy Coffee stood behind the counter. "I reckon I want to stay a while with you."

"Sart'in, I reckon I kin accommodate you; that is jest what I run this shanty for," the landlord responded, handing a pen to the newcomer as he spoke, and turning the hotel register around so he could write his name on the book.

MacMurphy was leaning on the end of the counter, and from his position could read the stranger's signature as he wrote it.

It was mere idle curiosity which induced him to pay any attention, for he had no idea that he was at all interested in the man, and he was surprised when the horseman wrote in clear, bold characters, "L. Hand, Galveston, Texas."

"Hello, why, is it possible?" he exclaimed.

"Eh?" said the other, evidently amazed.

"And are you Mr. Hand?"

"That is my name," responded the horseman, with a puzzled expression.

"Well, I certainly never should have expected it from your appearance!" the senator declared.

"You will excuse me for remarking that you have decidedly the advantage of me just at present."

"Why, I am the man you want to see, MacMurphy."

"Well, I am very much pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. MacMurphy," the horseman observed, taking the proffered hand which the senator extended, "but, upon my word, I was not aware that I wanted to see you."

It was now MacMurphy's turn to appear surprised.

"Why, is it possible that my friend, the mayor, did not mention my name to you?"

"Say, stranger, I reckon there must be some mistake here somewhere!" the other exclaimed.

"Why on earth should he?"

"Oh, no, there isn't any mistake. I am Senator MacMurphy, the man who was robbed, and my friend, the Mayor of New Orleans, telegraphed me that he had got you to take up the case, so there isn't any mistake about the matter."

"The Mayor of New Orleans!" the stranger exclaimed. "Oh, I thought you were talking about the Mayor of Galveston, and I was going to say that I never had the pleasure of meeting him, but really, Mr. MacMurphy, you are barking up the wrong tree in this matter. I don't know anything about your case."

"Eh? is that so?" the senator inquired. "Aren't you the Mr. L. Hand, the famous Government Secret Service detective?"

"How on earth did you get that idea into your head?" the other asked, an amazed look upon his face.

"Here, this dispatch from the Mayor of New Orleans explains the matter," and the senator fished the message out from among the other papers in his capacious wallet and gave it to the other.

Mr. Hand read the dispatch carefully and then, with a shake of his massive head, handed it back to MacMurphy.

"I reckon there must be another L. Hand wandering around somewhere down in this Southern country, for I am not the man. I am a planter in a small way, but am on the range just at present, looking for a new location."

"I am not anxious to buy, you know, for I am not well enough fixed for that, but I would like to rent a good place, or I would be willing to take a job as overseer on a big plantation. I know how to run a place, and if the plantation is good for anything I reckon I can make it pay out as well as any man that can be scared up."

MacMurphy plainly showed his disappointment.

"Well, I am sorry that you are not the man I took you to be, for I am feeling very sore over this robbery, and am anxious to get a good detective to take hold of the matter, for although there has been an exhaustive search it has been fruitless of result," the senator remarked.

By this time the new-comer had spied the handbill affixed to the wall behind the bar and he perused it attentively.

"Thunder! that is a big reward!" he exclaimed. "I just wish I was a detective so I could go

in for that twenty thousand dollars, but I reckon it is out of my line, and if you folk up here couldn't do anything it would be hardly worth while for me to try."

"Not much chance for you," Uncle Billy observed. "Nor for any one else to my thinking," he added, the senator having walked to the door to speak to Judge Waldron and Van Orden whom he caught sight of in the street.

"I reckon those gentlemen are some of the big boys of your town, eh?" the stranger asked as the pair joined the senator on the street.

The landlord explained who they were, and then Mr. Hand inquired if the landlord thought there was any opening for him.

Uncle Billy knew of a place on the Marshall road which could be had on shares, a small plantation, only a couple of hundred acres, but it was pretty good land, and the host said it was his opinion, although the last two or three tenants had not been able to make it pay, that if a good man took hold of the place it could be made profitable.

"I will ride up and take a look at it," the stranger remarked. "And, by the way, if you should happen to hear of any one who wants an overseer just bear me in mind."

Uncle Billy said he would and then Mr. Hand departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A QUEER CUSTOMER.

By the time that the stranger had finished his conversation with the landlord the three who had been conversing by the door had moved up the street, so when Mr. Hand came out and mounted his horse they were far enough away to be able to speak in regard to him without danger of his overhearing the conversation.

The senator had explained to his friends the odd coincidence, and he finished by remarking:

"He was not at all the kind of man that I expected to see, but when he wrote his name on the register, I felt sure of him."

"He looks more like a soldier than a detective," Judge Waldron remarked, surveying the stranger with an earnest gaze.

"Yes, he does indeed," Van Orden coincided.

"Oh, he has smelt fire, evidently!" the lawyer declared.

Then the conversation turned to another subject, and we will follow the horseman as he rode out of Jonesville, taking the Marshall road.

Like the majority of men who are not used to trusting their thoughts to confidants the horseman was accustomed to think aloud when alone.

When he got fairly out of the town he began:

"Senator MacMurphy looks like a smart man and most certainly his successful career bears out the statement that he is a man of brains, yet in this business he has blundered like a veritable greenhorn."

"The idea of accosting the man, whom he supposed to be the detective come to help him get his money back, in a public place like a bar-room, with the landlord and half-a-dozen loungers within hearing. If he had any sense he ought to have known that the thief-catcher who really knows anything about his business is always careful to keep in the background as much as possible."

"I do not doubt that this foolishness will make mischief, although I was prompt to deny the soft impeachment."

The horseman had been proceeding at a brisk gallop while indulging in these reflections and by the time he came to the end of them was within sight of the place he sought.

The landlord's description had been a good one, and the rider recognized the place the moment he caught sight of it.

He dismounted, tied his horse to a tree and then proceeded to the house on foot.

"The landlord was right about the place needing repairs; it does sadly!" the stranger remarked as he approached the house, which was built after the southern style, a low story and a half dwelling with verandas almost surrounding it.

As the horseman came to a halt, in front of the house, a man made his appearance from the rear of the building.

He was a short, thick-set fellow dressed in a dark suit, a little the worse for wear, still far better than the average countryman's attire.

He had a fat face, smoothly shaven and his head was covered with a scanty growth of jet-black hair which curled in tiny ringlets.

Upon his head, worn well back and cocked over one ear in a jaunty fashion, was a high-crowned slouch-hat, a brigandish-looking "tile."

The man's vest was open, revealing the fact that his linen was not as clean as it might be, although his collar was in good condition, and when his vest was closed, the broad, flat necktie which he wore concealed the soiled and rumpled bosom.

In his hand the man carried a light switch, which he flourished in an extremely jaunty manner.

"How are you, sir," he exclaimed, in the most friendly way as he advanced toward the horse-

man who had halted upon beholding him, and as he spoke he waved the switch in the air, giving a military salute. "I am delighted to see you again, particularly as I meet you so entirely unexpectedly."

"Believe me, you were the last man in my thoughts, yet here we come, face to face with each other," and as he came to the end of his speech, he drew his heels together in a peculiar manner and made an extremely elaborate bow.

The horseman surveyed the stranger for a moment with his keen, gray eyes and then he shook his head.

"Stranger, I reckon you have got the advantage of me; I disremember ever coming across you before."

"Is that possible?" exclaimed the other, flinging his arms wildly up in the air in an extremely theatrical way. "Can it be that my busy, bustling brain is distraught? Am I mad nor-nor'-west, do I not know a hawk from a hand-saw—did I not encounter your noble self and hold high wassail with you in—let me see?" and the man pressed the palms of his hands against his head as though this peculiar manner aided him to remember.

"Where was it now—in Memphis—Orleans?" and the speaker fixed his watery blue eyes, which bulged out in an extremely strange manner, upon the face of the horseman as he spoke.

"Well, I have been in Memphis and New Orleans, but I disremember striking you in either town."

"Let me speak my name—to you the tale it may recall! I am Clarence Montague!"

And as he pronounced the name he struck an attitude, folded his arms and glared up at the sky in an extremely tragic way.

"Don't remember you, stranger," the other remarked. "I reckon you have made a mistake."

"Possibly; a thought strikes me—ha, ha, ha!" and Mr. Montague laughed in anything but a cheerful way.

"It is the old story, the fellow who looks like me! ha, ha, ha! You take, my friend, you see the point? Devilish good joke, eh? ha, ha, ha!"

The horseman nodded and smiled, but the mirth of the other was far from being contagious, for there wasn't any real merriment in it.

"And since we two have met as strangers upon this blasted heath, it is as well that we should know each other," the odd genius continued. "For in this wide world of ours, which after all is but a narrow, circumscribed sphere, where men are continually jostling elbows, it is but right that we poor humans should as brothers be to each other; one touch of nature makes the whole world akin!" spouted the man in his absurd, theatrical way.

Again the horseman nodded; he saw that there wasn't any necessity for him to say anything; the other was quite content and willing to do all the talking.

"Sir, I judge from your bearing and conversation that though you may be 'native and to the manner born,' yet you have gone abroad, 'strange countries for to see,' like Lord Bateman, renowned in story."

"Yes, I have traveled a little."

"Of course! a man of the world, like myself, a fellow of infinite discernment, could see that with half an eye. You understand how the old thing works then, and, therefore, I feel no hesitation in telling you who I am. Although 'I could a tale unfold which would harrow up thy young soul and make each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porcupine,' yet for the love I bear thy gracious self I spake thee, 'for this steel' is sacred to thy lord!"

And as he fairly howled the words he flourished the switch in the air.

By this time the average man would have become pretty well satisfied that this strange individual was slightly cracked in the upper story, but as the horseman had met just such another man before, he knew better.

"You, as a man of the world, a gentleman, both by birth and breeding, have, probably, guessed my calling?"

The horseman nodded.

"I am an actor!" and the speaker made a profound bow as though he was addressing an audience. "A tragedian and in my time I have made Rome howl!" and Mr. Montague gave emphasis to the speech by howling himself.

"What on earth are you doing down in this region?"

"Thereby hangs a tale," replied the tragedian in an extremely mysterious way. "I was the star of a barn-storming party—you understand the meaning of that?"

The horseman shook his head.

"A small party of Thespians who visit the little towns, emulating the strolling players of Garrick's time who usually performed in barns; the barns are gone, and pretty good halls have taken their places, but still the name clings to the poor player—'take in the clothes, mother, the actors are coming!' Such is the vile gibe hurled at the traveling actor who may one day be a Booth or a Forrest."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRAGEDIAN IS ASTONISHED.

"YES, that is true enough," the horseman observed.

"Our little troupe struck Marshall; our party was well-heeled—with landlords," and then the tragedian gave vent to a sardonic chuckle. "We had three of the sharks with us; three wise men who knew how to keep a hotel, but whom the poor actors had struck for sundry ducats.

"They journeyed with us in the hope of getting some of the aforesaid shackles out of our receipts, and I think I may say without flattery that it was a crowning stroke of genius when I utilized the three venerable buffers; two of them kept door, and the third man who had got the insane idea into his head that he had the making of an actor in him, played small parts; he wanted to do the leads, the Hamlets and the Romeos, a fat, bandy-legged churl, with the stomach of an alderman and a voice like a penny-whistle. I give you my word, his acting was so bad that it would have made the angels weep, but we didn't strike any angels in Texas; I presume the climate does not agree with them."

"Probably not," the other remarked, decidedly amused by this strange character.

"As I presume you have gathered from my words, business had been vile with our troupe for some time, the ghost had not walked—that is the actor's argot for stating that no salaries had been paid—for so long that we had almost forgotten how it seemed to go into the manager's apartment on Monday noon and receive our rewards of merit.

"We were on our uppers—pardon the slang—and Marshall administered the finishing touch.

"On the Monday night we opened to six dollars, and yet I did Claude in the Lady of Lyons, a performance which has won the plaudits of critical multitudes in the cultivated East, but here, in the wilds of Texas, the jumping-off place of creation, it was literally casting pearls before swine. What they want down in this region is not the legitimate but the leg drama—the Black Crook or a variety show, Heaven save the mark!" and the tragedian shook his head in a disgusted way.

"Well, sir," the actor continued after a moment's pause, "that measly six-dollar house was the last straw which broke the camel's back.

"The landlords deserted us; they had suddenly come to the conclusion that by endeavoring to keep the World Renowned New York Colossal Combination on its legs they were only throwing good money after bad, and they weakened.

"A very natural determination for them to arrive at I should suppose."

"We could have spared the landlords, but, to add insult to injury, the fat rascal who thought he could act carried off both of the ladies of the troupe. He got mashed on our leading woman, and being an unmarried man persuaded her to wed with him, and the other one went along to take charge of the dining-room. Oh! what a fall was there, my countrymen!"

"This broke up your troupe?"

"You bet! All there was left of the Colossal Combination was myself and three wretched fakirs.

"We were stranded; The hashman's grasp was on our trunks, The hashman's voice rung through the hall You do not pay your board at all, In Marshall, in Marshall."

"Forgive my dropping into poetry. The lines are remembrances of the past, and carry me back to the time when the city of Buffalo, where the verses originated, was a theatrical graveyard and bu'st every party that struck the town.

"Our old man got a job as chambermaid in a livery stable; the man who used to mount the winged steed, Pegasus, now rubs down the fiery untamed hotel omnibus horse and combs the paint-brush tail of the dray man's wild mule. The other two sneaked out of town on a midnight freight train, but I, having some years ago struck a couple of angels in Shreveport, rare Southern gentlemen, all of the olden time, made up my mind to hoof it to the banks of the Red.

"The landlord of the hash-house gave me his blessing and a dollar, and thus far have I marched on into the bowel of the land without impediment!" And the tragedian stamped his foot and shook his clinched fist at the sky in the most approved theatrical way.

While he had been delivering his recital an idea had occurred to the horseman, and so he remarked, quietly:

"This is a pretty good story of yours."

"Eh?" exclaimed the tragedian.

"I say that your story is a pretty good one."

"Now by my halidom I swear I understand you not!" the other declared.

"If I did not know to the contrary I should swallow it without question."

"Dost thou doubt my tale—my plain, round, unvarnished tale?" the tragedian demanded, in astonishment.

"Yes, because I know better."

"You do?"

"I do."

"Is it possible that I was changed when at nurse, and I am not myself at all?" he cried, in the deepest of voices.

"Your disguise is a remarkably good one, and if I didn't know you I should undoubtedly be deceived."

The actor looked at the other for a moment, and then, stepping close to him, whispered in his ear in deep tones:

"Perchance thou hast from some lunatic asylum escaped?"

"Oh, no, I reckon my head-piece is all right; but I know you, all the same."

"Then I am not Clarence Montague, the world-renowned tragedian, the favorite actor of two continents?"

"No, sir!"

"Aha! do I hear aright—do not my ears deceive me?" the tragedian cried, with a melodramatic start. "If I am not myself, who am I? Read me this riddle quickly, I pray thee!"

The true Lone Hand smiled, as he replied:

"Why, you are L. Hand, the celebrated Secret Service detective!"

"The deuce I am!" the other exclaimed, so astonished by the declaration that he dropped his absurd theatrical way and spoke in a natural manner.

"Yes, you have been sent by the Mayor of New Orleans up into this section to try and ferret out the mysterious masked robber, locally termed by the natives the Bad Man of the Big Bayou, who has committed some particularly bold robberies in this region, and whose last exploit was the stealing of fifty thousand dollars from Senator MacMurphy."

"Fifty thousand dollars!" cried the tragedian, in amazement. "Ye gods and little fishes! that was a haul!"

"Yes; all in one-thousand-dollar bills, and the senator offers a reward of twenty thousand dollars—ten thousand for the recovery of the money, and ten thousand for the capture of the robber, dead or alive."

"I say, if a man could strike a stake like that, it would be a first-class star engagement."

"That is exactly what you have come here to do."

"Oh, it is, eh?" and the actor put his tongue in his cheek, and then winked in a mysterious way at the horseman.

"Yes, that is your little game; and by one of those strange coincidences which sometimes occur, Mr. MacMurphy, warned by the Mayor of New Orleans that you, Mr. L. Hand, had consented to take the case, and had started for this region, was on the lookout and mistook me for the man he expected."

"Ah, yes; I see!" and the tragedian nodded wisely.

"Of course, the mayor acted rashly in telegraphing the particulars, especially as he had been requested to keep quiet about the matter, for the man who really knows the detective business doesn't go about proclaiming who he is in the streets."

"No, it is only on the stage that that sort of thing is done," the actor observed, with a grin.

"You ought to see me do Hawkshaw in the Ticket of Leave Man. 'Who will take it?' 'I will!'—off comes wig and beard—'Hawkshaw, the detective! ha! ha!'" and the tragedian struck an attitude.

"That sort of thing is very dramatic, no doubt, but it isn't business; but, as I was explaining about the coincidence, my name happens to be L. Hand, and the moment I registered at the hotel, Mr. MacMurphy, who happened to see my signature, pounced upon me at once, mistaking me for the Secret Service detective, L. Hand, whom he expected. This was in the open bar-room, mind; so you see he was just as foolish in his way as the Mayor of New Orleans was in his."

"Very natural under the circumstances."

"Yes, but extremely imprudent, for if I had been the detective, this open disclosure would have gone far to render it impossible for me to be of any service in the matter, for the thief would at once have been put on his guard."

"Of course I explained that I was not the man—no detective, only a planter in search of a good location, and that is what brings me to this ranch."

"I see; this answered for my hotel last night, and as I had a comfortable bed in one of the sheds, I slept late this morning."

"Your disguise is a good one, but if I were you, I would drop it when you go into Jonesville, that is the next town where you are expected, and call yourself by your proper name."

"Mr. L. Hand, eh?"

"Yes."

"I think I tumble to the leetle game and I will bet a pile of ducats that I can show them a detective that will open their eyes!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ARRANGING THE PROGRAMME.

"YES, sir-ee, the fame I have won in playing Hawkshaw is astounding. Oshkosh rose at me, and Penn Yan paled with fright," the tragedian continued.

"You are safe in betting all the shekels 'ou can raise that I will do the character to life,

but—excuse the directness of the question—where does your humble servant to command come in in this leetle game?"

"How does twenty-five dollars a week strike you?"

"Well, it is fair," the actor remarked, caressing his chin with his hand. "Not much, though, to a man who has been accustomed to receiving fifty dollars per night, with a half-clear benefit on the Friday of each week, half of the gross receipts, you understand."

"Did you get half of the six-dollar house in Marshall?" the Lone Hand asked, for the horseman was the famous detective, despite of his denial of the fact to the senator.

"Ab, no more of that, Hal, an' thou lovest me!" the tragedian exclaimed. "I was merely telling you what I usually receive. On this trip, of course, it was a sort of a commonwealth. We, the actors were to share the profits, but as there never were any profits, right from the beginning, we did not do as much sharing as we might have done under more favorable circumstances."

"Twenty-five dollars a week you say?"

"That is the figure."

"With expenses, of course; that is always included in all first-class companies," the tragedian remarked in an insinuating way.

"Expenses? what do you mean by expenses?"

"Board and transportation by railroad or boat as the case may be," the tragedian explained. "I have always been accustomed to having a private Pullman car of my own and a coach to convey me to and from the theater, but, I suppose, for this engagement I shall have to waive those luxuries, essential as they are to my comfort, and so conducive to good acting."

"Yes, I reckon I cannot provide either Pullman car or coach, but the board I will stand, also your fare from the next station, which is only a couple of miles off," the Lone Hand replied.

"You must go back to that point and take the train; you understand that you have come from New Orleans by way of Galveston, then up the road to Marshall and down this line."

"Exactly! trust me, we actors are posted in regard to railroad matters. There is hardly a railroad in the United States, or Canada, which I cannot give you points on—whether the conductors—pardon the joke—are inclined to be accommodating, and will pass the profession, if a man happens to strike them in a state of disgusting impecuniosity, or, Shylock-like, demand the letter of the bond, no ticket no ride, hoof it to the next town, go count the ties, ascertain the number of telegraph poles to the mile and report upon the condition of the track."

"Let me see; you ought to have some baggage," the Lone Hand remarked, reflectively.

"A famous man like yourself would not be apt to come on a long journey without even a hand-satchel."

"Oh, that is all right!" the tragedian exclaimed in a tone of perfect confidence.

"You let me alone to work that trick to the queen's taste; I have told too many ghost stories in my time to landlords in regard to missing baggage so that I might secure accommodation without putting up collateral in advance to be troubled about a little thing of that kind."

"My valise, duly checked, was lost on the road; the miserable railroad men put it off by mistake at some station, but when, at Marshall, I discovered that it was missing I kicked up a holy row, left my check there with a friend who promised to forward it when it was traced and sent on."

"That will do nicely."

"Oh, I am an ancient fakir and I have told tales of that kind so often in the course of my checkered life that at last I have come to believe that they are true myself," the tragedian remarked with a grin of satisfaction.

"Doubt not that I will play this part so perfectly that the audience will cry as one man, 'well roared—let him roar again!'

"But there is one little point that I must touch upon," the actor added, after a slight pause. "As I confessed to you, with that charming frankness so characteristic of a noble soul, I am about broke, and it is not seemly, nor natural, that a great detective should strike a town without the wherewithal in his pocket to set up a round of drinks for the gang, so, if you could favor me with a slight advance, 'your praises will be written where every day I turn the leaf to read!'"

"Certainly, here are twenty dollars," and the Lone Hand gave the money to the tragedian, who received it with a profound bow.

"But one thing I must mention: your speaking of drinking puts it into my mind; be careful how you indulge, for if you allow the liquor to get the best of you all the fat will be in the fire," the Lone Hand remarked. He was a good judge of character, and saw in the man's face that he was addicted to strong drink.

"Oh, me noble lord, give yourself no uneasiness on that score, I do beseech you!" the tragedian exclaimed, with an extended sweep of his hand.

"I will admit, without dispute, that I am fond of looking upon the wine 'when it is red,'

or pink, or yellow, or any other color, for that matter, so long as it has the necessary ginger in it, and can be depended upon to take hold all the way down, but as to allowing the potent fluid which 'biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder' to get the best of me, I say, emphatically, not for Joe! No, sir, that is not the kind of a hairpin that I am, for I am rough, 'tough and devilish sly.' I will admit, that once in a while, when the humor seizes me, I do get as drunk as a lord, but no matter how great the jag I have on—how big my head may be—I am always capable of taking care of myself, and never forget my natural caution."

"That is good; and now let me explain to you how matters stand," and the Lone Hand related the particulars of the robbery.

"It is a big thing!" the actor declared. "I have heard of a great many big operations in this line, but this particular affair 'bags the persimmons!'"

"Yes, that is true, and I fancy that it will be a difficult job to catch the rascal."

"Say, while I am on this detective lay it would not be a bad idea for me to try my hand at the game; I should like to clutch a stake of twenty thousand ducats. I suppose you would not mind another Richmond in the field?"

"Oh, no, you are welcome to go in for the prize; and, by the by, when we meet in Caddoville it must be as strangers, you know."

"Oh, yes, certainly, of course, you can depend upon me to do the job up brown!" the tragedian asserted. "I haven't been acting for thirty years for nothing, and if I cannot fool these countrymen into the belief that I am the greatest detective who ever followed a clew, then I am not the man I take myself to be."

"Be careful not to overdo the matter," the other continued. "These men with whom you will have to transact business are not countrymen; Senator MacMurphy is a shrewd, long-headed man, and Judge Waldron, his legal adviser, is probably as keen a lawyer as can be found in any metropolis."

"Oh, believe me, noble sir, I will be on my guard!" the tragedian protested. "Though now I am loud and full of speech, it is because mine own true nature I am showing, but when I strike Caddoville, as L. Hand, the celebrated Secret Service detective, I will be quiet, wary, fox-like; me tongue upon me lips, a fund of speculation ju me eyes; me speech will be naught but ambiguous givings out, I could if I would, and if I would I could. Oh, mighty satrap! believe me, I will play the character to the life—play it so well that all men with one accord will cry: 'Indeed, he is a Heaven-born detective!'"

"All right, you perform your part of the contract and you will find that I will live up to mine."

"By the way, a sudden thought strikes me!" exclaimed the tragedian, abruptly. "What does the L stand for? It would be durned awkward, you know, if some inquisitive soul should ask me what was my baptismal appellation."

"Yes, it would," the other admitted. "But in order to answer your question a brief explanation must be made. L. Hand stands for Lone Hand, because the detective is accustomed to play that kind of a game; it is not the right appellation of the man at all, but only a nickname fastened on him by accident."

"Yes, yes, I see, just as the pugilists are called, Game Chicken, Somebody's Mouse, the Spider, Infant, Nonpareil, and various other absurd names."

"Yes, but in this case we will say that the L stands for Lewis—Lewis Hand."

"That will do admirably!" the tragedian declared. "Let me see, how soon does this train come along?"

The Lone Hand consulted his watch.

"In about an hour."

"I had better be stirring my stirrups then. I know where the station is; the road crosses the track at that point."

"Farewell then, I will meet thee at Philippi!"

Then the tragedian shook hands with the other, waved his palm above his head as though to invoke a blessing, then marched off up the road, swinging his switch in the air, as light-hearted as if he owned the fee simple of all Louisiana.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN NO. 13.

THE Lone Hand watched the tragedian until he disappeared around a bend in the road.

"If that fellow will only keep sober I do not doubt he will succeed in deceiving all Jonesville into the belief that he is the detective, and I will be able to pursue my investigation without having the eyes of the whole town fixed upon me."

"Thanks to his lucky meeting I will be able to cover up my tracks; the robber, and his confederates—for there is little doubt in my mind that the man is not doing this work alone—will watch him instead of me, so my mind is easier than it was."

"Now to examine this plantation so I will be able to give an account of it, just as if I was a planter in search of a place."

The examination over, the Lone Hand mounted his horse and returned to Jonesville, and as he

expected, the landlord was anxious to know what he thought of the plantation.

The Lone Hand replied that the place might do if he couldn't get any better one, but it was not exactly what he wanted.

Uncle Billy "reckoned" he would be able to find some other places when he had time to think about the matter and then the Lone Hand went up-stairs to his room.

He had been assigned to No. 14, the opposite room to the unlucky No. 13, where the robbery had taken place.

An old colored uncle who acted as a sort of major-domo in the hotel showed the guest to his room, and, naturally, when they passed No. 13, he pointed it out as the room where "Massa MacMurphy" had been plundered.

The Lone Hand professed to be greatly interested, and the aged darky gladly improved the opportunity to tell the story of the robbery, and allowed the guest to inspect the room.

The detective took particular note of the wardrobe, which played so prominent a part in the tale, standing against the wall which separated No. 13, from No. 12.

Then, when he was shown into No. 14, he said that he did not like the room but would prefer one on the opposite side of the entry.

"How is Number 12?" he asked.

"Dat is all right, sah, it is not taken; you kin hab dat, sah, if you like."

So the Lone Hand was placed in No. 12, and the darky withdrew.

In this room was a wardrobe something like the one in No. 13, excepting that it was of common wood, and not quite so large.

It was placed against the wall which separated No. 12, from No. 13, and the detective, who had a carpenter's eye, judged that it was in about the same place.

"Aha!" the Lone Hand exclaimed when he made this discovery, "this wardrobe would afford a cover if the wall has been tampered with, so let's see if it has."

Taking care to first lock his door so as to secure himself from being intruded upon, the investigator proceeded to move the wardrobe, and, to his astonishment, behind the heavy piece of furniture he discovered a door which connected the two rooms.

"Oho! this explains how the fellow got into the apartment!" he exclaimed. "And how strange that no one thought of this door!"

It was locked and the key missing; after inspecting the lock Lone Hand came to the conclusion that it was just about the same kind of a one as that upon the door leading into the hall, and the thought came to him that it was possible that one key would fit both locks, as they were common, cheap ones.

He made the trial; his conclusion was correct; the key worked all right and when the door was opened the back of the wardrobe in No. 13 was exposed to view, and there in the thin boards which composed the back of the ancient piece of furniture a door had been contrived, opening into No. 12, so that any one could pass through the wardrobe into the other apartment.

"This discovery settles this mysterious bit of business," the detective remarked as he proceeded to restore things to their normal condition.

"Now this shows that this robbery was a carefully planned affair, and the man who did it was an exceedingly smart rascal.

"The next point is to ascertain who occupied this room on the night of the robbery, and when I am in possession of that information it will be a very easy matter for me to put my hand on the thief."

The Lone Hand was not the man to allow any grass to grow under his feet when he once got a clew, so he immediately proceeded down stairs and engaged the landlord in conversation.

He spoke of the negro relating to him the particulars of the robbery.

This started Uncle Billy and for fear that the darky had not got the story right, he told it all over again.

The Lone Hand listened patiently, thinking something new might come out, but in this he was disappointed, and he remarked.

"Well, I must admit that by all odds this is about the strangest affair that I ever heard of in all my travels."

"Yes, sir, you can bet all your pile on that, and you would be safe to win every time!" Uncle Billy declared.

"By the way, I changed my room and have taken Number 12 instead of 14."

"All right; don't make a bit of difference," the host responded, and taking a pen he changed the 14, which was on the line opposite to the Lone Hand's signature, to 12.

The guest affected to take considerable interest in this performance and turned the book around so that he could survey the change.

"Yes, that fixes it up all right," he remarked, and then he ran his eyes carelessly up the column where the numbers of the rooms were placed.

He was in search of another twelve, and not finding it turned the leaf.

On the bottom of the next page the figure met his eyes.

"Hallo! Gideon Beasley has been here!" he exclaimed, as he noted the name which was

opposite to the number, but although he felt a thrill of satisfaction when he made the discovery that the man who had registered, in a shockingly bad "back" hand, as Gideon Beasley occupied room No. 12 on the very night that the robbery of Senator MacMurphy had taken place, he was master enough of himself not to betray the exultation which he felt.

"Gideon Beasley?" said the landlord, in a questioning tone.

"Yes, I reckon he is an old friend of mine, although I haven't run across him for a dog's age; that is, if this Gideon Beasley is the one I knew."

"The man was a stranger to me," Uncle Billy remarked, scratching his head reflectively as though the question aided his memory. "I disremember ever seeing him in Caddoville afore. He was looking arter stock and said he had his headquarters at Shreveport."

"That is the man for a thousand dollars!" the Lone Hand exclaimed. "After stock? yes, yes, that is his old business. A mighty wise man Gid Beasley is too, I can tell you!"

"Yes, I reckon so, but I didn't get to know him very well."

"How was that?" the Lone Hand inquired, with the appearance of great interest.

"Wa-al, he only stopped hyer a few hours and so there wasn't much chance for me to see what kind of a man he was."

"Oh, then this ain't one of his old stamping-grounds?"

"I reckon not; leastways I never saw him before, and I would have been likely to if he had hung out round Caddoville much."

"Well, now that is queer!" the Lone Hand remarked, in a thoughtful way. "I had an idea that he did a good deal of business up this way."

"I reckon not, 'cos I would be apt to know him, and I disremember ever seeing him until the time when he came in hyer and took a room."

"I judge that he didn't make much of a stop with you," the seeker after knowledge remarked, being careful not to betray by his manner how important was the question.

"I reckon he didn't, and that was the reason I didn't get to know him. You see, it was this way: He came in the afternoon and said he reckoned he would stop a while with me. He came in on foot, having struck a good chance to trade his boss on the road, and he said he was one of those men who never let a good trade slip him—"

"That's so!" the Lone Hand exclaimed. "That is Gid Beasley to the life!"

"And consequently he was pretty well tucked out when he caine in, and so, arter I give him a room, he went up to git a snooze, and didn't come down until 'bout seven o'clock, just as the gals were clearing away the supper things. He went into the dining-room and got a bite, and then he allowed to me that he reckoned he would be going, 'cos he had forgotten an appointment which he had at Old Monterey whar he had to see a party 'bout some stock."

"Why, he did not reckon to walk to Old Monterey, did he?" the Lone Hand asked.

The detective had provided himself with a good map of the district before leaving New Orleans, and during his journey to the Caddo region had studied it attentively, so that he was about as familiar with the country as though he had been an old resident.

"Oh, no, he reckoned to git a horse somewhar on the road."

"That's Gid Beasley, I reckon! What sort of a chap was he?"

The landlord described the man as nearly as he could remember; and the Lone Hand professed to be satisfied that it was the party he knew.

The entrance of other guests afforded the man a chance to withdraw, and he proceeded to the corral.

CHAPTER XX. ON THE TRAIL.

MOUNTING his horse, the Lone Hand rode up the street, and then took the road which led to Old Monterey.

"Now then, I think I understand this matter pretty well," he soliloquized as he rode along the pleasant country road. "I have secured a clew beyond a doubt. This stockman, Gideon Beasley, is the man who committed the robbery. From the description, I should judge that the fellow was disguised. The dark, bushy hair is a wig, his face and hands are stained, and so if I proceed to search for any such man I shall only lose my time, for, it is certain, after committing the robbery, that he would drop his disguise as soon as possible.

"The yarn about the horse-trading is all bosh, of course. The fellow had a beast, and concealed him somewhere in the neighborhood of the town, probably in the corral of a confederate.

"The pretense of being tired, and of lying down, was to afford him an opportunity of examining the lay of the land, so as to see the best way to work the job. I am going on the assumption that the rascal had ascertained the

senator would occupy No. 13, and had marked him for a victim.

"MacMurphy and his party did not get in until late in the afternoon, therefore the fellow had plenty of time to operate on the back of the wardrobe in the senator's rooms, so as to be able to gain an entrance, and, by listening, he would be able to ascertain all that was said in MacMurphy's room.

"Undoubtedly the senator and his friends talked freely, not having a suspicion that an eavesdropper was near, and so the fellow was able to pick up some valuable information.

"Then, in order to avert suspicion, he pretended to go away, after having completed all the arrangements for the robbery.

"The thing worked to a charm, too, for no one has suspected that this stranger had anything to do with the matter, but now I have struck the trail, and I fancy it will not take me long to ascertain whether this Gid Beasley is an honest stockman or a rascal, masquerading in disguise, as I suspect."

The Lone Hand's plan of operations was an extremely simple one.

He intended to inquire along the road to Old Monterey if Mr. Gideon Beasley had bought, or tried to buy, a horse at any of the plantations.

And his investigations produced exactly the result which he had anticipated.

Not one of the planters had either seen or heard of such a man.

After fully satisfying himself on this point the Lone Hand turned and rode back to Caddoville.

Leaving his horse at the corral he re-entered the hotel.

The actor had just affixed his name to the register, and the landlord, reading it, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, catching sight of the Lone Hand at the same moment.

"Dog my cats! if this ain't a queer thing!" Uncle Billy Coffee cried.

"What is it, mine host?" inquired the tragedian.

"Why you and this hyer gentleman have got the same name!" the landlord replied, nodding toward the Lone Hand.

"The more gracious then is our state!" the actor exclaimed, with a courtly bow to the newcomer, which the other returned, and then accepted the hand tendered by the tragedian. "You are of the ancient and renowned family of Hands, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"L. Hand too?"

"L. Hand."

"Not Lewis?"

"No, Lemuel."

"Well, Lem, I am glad to see you!" and the actor shook the hand of the other heartily.

"Are you from Arkansas?"

"No, Texas."

"I will go bail that you are not in the same line of business as myself!" the tragedian cried, with a knowing wink to the landlord.

"I am a planter in a small way although not running a place at present."

"Well, no planter am I; I am on the detective lay, and my business up in this neck of the woods is to examine into this mysterious robbery and hunt down the scoundrel who relieved Senator MacMurphy of fifty thousand dollars in hard cash. Come! have a drink! Landlord, you will join us, of course!"

The tragedian spoke with the air of a prince, and he moved with the greatest dignity as he led the way to the bar.

After the drinks were dispatched the actor inquired for the senator.

"He's up in his room with Judge Waldron—his lawyer, you know," the landlord answered.

"Well, if you will have the kindness to notify him that I have arrived and crave speech with him, I shall esteem it a favor," the actor remarked, in his grandiloquent way.

"Yes, sir, I will attend to it in a brace of shakes!" and Uncle Billy hastened away.

"Take care that you don't drink too much, for when the whisky is in the wit is out, you know," the Lone Hand continued.

There was no one near the bar at the moment so he was able to speak without danger of being overheard.

"Have no fear, me noble lord!" the other replied. "I do plead guilty to the soft impeachment of taking a souce now and then, and I will admit that I do not always know when I get enough. I never got so drunk yet that I did not know what I was about; I never stagger and it takes a man intimately acquainted with me to detect that I am in liquor."

"You must get a chance to report to me after you have seen the senator. You will in all probability get some points from him that will be useful to me. My room is Number 12."

"All right! I will contrive to see you there."

"And be careful, you know, that you are not observed, for it would be apt to upset my plans if it was discovered that we were in communication."

"You may rely upon my discretion."

The reappearance of the landlord at this point interrupted the conversation.

"The senator is awaiting for you up in Number 13," Uncle Billy announced.

"Fare you well then, gentlemen; I will see you anon," and with a dignified bow the tragedian departed.

The announcement of the number of the senator's room caused an idea to flash into the mind of the Lone Hand.

There was no need for him to depend upon the actor for an account of his interview with MacMurphy. By moving out the wardrobe and opening the door between the two rooms it would be possible for him to sit in his own apartment and hear every word of the conversation in the other, so the man-hunter immediately proceeded up-stairs.

His supposition was correct: by moving the wardrobe and putting the door ajar he was able to hear every word spoken in the other room as distinctly as though he was in the apartment.

Realizing that the interview was likely to be a long one the Lone Hand brought a chair to the crack of the door and proceeded to make himself comfortable.

We will not weary the reader by detailing the conversation at length, for all the facts have already been given, although to the eager listener much was new, and, to his thinking, decidedly important.

On account of the blunder made by MacMurphy in addressing him in an open bar-room, in the presence of gaping strangers, he had been compelled to deny that he was the detective from New Orleans, for it was his judgment that he would not be able to do any good work if all the town knew what he was up to.

Another consequence of this piece of stupidity on the part of the senator was that he was prevented from communicating with him and learning from his own lips all the particulars of the affair.

Now, for the first time, he heard the banker's story of his adventures on the road to Jonesville, how the hack had been delayed on account of the horses having been tampered with; then how in Jonesville he was not able to use the telegraph because the wire had been cut, and the discovery that Van Orden had made of the clever manner in which the thief had managed to get rid of the greater part of the stolen money in Jonesville and Marshall.

"Oho," muttered the Lone Hand, as he listened with eager ears to this important information, "this is very valuable news indeed. In the first place it shows that I have no common, vulgar rascal to contend with, but a man of brains, one fertile in expedients, or he never would be capable of such acts of generalship.

"In all my experience I do not recall any neater bit of work than this.

"Point the first, the man is a first-class rogue, or else he never would have been able to work the trick in this scientific way; point the second, he is not a professional, but an amateur, and therefore will be doubly hard to trap, for he will not be apt to work in a groove; point the third, last and most important of all, the man is a resident of this neighborhood and has no intention of evading justice through flight.

"This is shown by the pains he has taken to get rid of the thousand-dollar bills and by the fact that he procured gold, which is a bulky substance and not anywhere near as convenient to carry as the paper money.

"It might be urged that he got rid of the bills for fear that they would be identified, but that reason would not be strong if the man intended to go any distance from the scene of his crime.

"No, no, it is evident to me that the rascal, confident he can escape discovery, has no idea of seeking safety in flight, and so there is a chance that I can trap him."

While the Lone Hand had been thus communing with himself, the conversation in the other room had been going on and the watcher had not allowed a single word to escape him, but no more important information did he obtain.

The actor played the part of detective very well; that is, he was the detective of the popular notion; rather loud in assertion, profuse in winks and mysterious nods, and not at all backward in announcing that he was satisfied he already had a good clew to follow, and that, in his mind, there was not much doubt he would succeed in soon clapping the "darbies" on the wrists of the Bad Man of the Big Bayou.

He took copious notes and finally withdrew.

"What do you think of him?" the senator asked, after the supposed detective was fairly out of bearing.

The Lone Hand waited with considerable curiosity for the old lawyer's reply. Already he had come to the conclusion that the judge was a remarkably able man, and, as a lawyer, ranked high, and therefore he was inquisitive in regard to the impression produced by the masquerading actor.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I am rather disappointed," Judge Waldron remarked, slowly.

"Is that so?"

"Yes; he is not the kind of man I expected to see at all. I happen to know something of this Mr. L. Hand by reputation, for I was up in Arkansas a year ago, and although I did not meet the gentleman, yet I was acquainted with a party who knew him well, and he gave me a

deal of information about the man and his exploits."

"And this fellow doesn't fill the bill, eh?"

"Not at all!" the lawyer responded, decidedly. "The L. Hand of my Arkansas friend was a tall, soldierly fellow—a man who had served all through the war and won a grade in the Union Army, captain or major, I forget which; a quiet, cool fellow, not much given to talk, and bearing the reputation of being as brave as a lion."

"Well, this L. Hand does not answer to that description at all; but I must say he is a good deal like the detectives whom I have met in New Orleans, so I reckon there isn't any doubt that the man is what he represents himself to be."

"Oh, yes, I don't think there is any doubt about that; but, I am disappointed. This other L. Hand is more like the man I expected to see."

"Well, popular heroes, you know, seldom come up to their descriptions; so it is no wonder the detective falls short," the senator remarked.

Then the two arose to go down-stairs, and the Lone Hand's watch came to an end.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COUNTY DOCTOR.

SHORTLY after the Lone Hand left the saloon for the purpose of playing the spy upon the men in the senator's apartment, a gentleman entered the hotel who was warmly greeted by Uncle Billy Coffee.

This party, although we have referred to him several times in the course of our tale, we have not yet described, and as he is destined to play a prominent part in our story, we will now repair the omission.

He was the county doctor, Mortimer Kingsland.

In person, Mr. Kingsland was a man a little above the medium size, well built, and carrying his years lightly, for he was over fifty, although few would have taken him to be as old as he was by a dozen years.

He had the long, oval face common to the men of the Southwest, was smoothly shaven, and his jet-black hair, thinly streaked here and there with gray, was worn long, "clubbed" over the ears in the old-time Southern fashion.

His square-set chin and stern, dark eyes showed that he was a man of resolution, and there was no one in Caddo parish who bore a higher reputation.

He was the only doctor for miles around, and in addition to his medical practice ran a good-sized plantation, situated some six miles from Caddoville.

Doctor Kingsland shook hands with the landlord, then they took a drink together, a ceremony seldom neglected when acquaintances meet in the Southwest, and the doctor glancing at the register, inquired in regard to the news.

Uncle Billy, glad to be able to impart information, called Doctor Kingsland's attention to the actor's signature.

"That L. Hand that is the celebrated detective from Orleans, come up hyar on purpose to catch the rascal who stole Senator MacMurphy's money," he explained.

"Well, I sincerely hope he will succeed in doing it for if he believes us of the Bad Man of the Big Bayou he will confer a decided benefit on the whole parish," the doctor remarked.

"Wa-al, I reckon he will do the job up brown," the landlord declared, having been decidedly impressed by the imposing manner of the bogus detective. "He is a right peart talking fellow, and I reckon he is up to snuff."

At this moment the doctor happened to notice the signature of the genuine L. Hand on the register.

"Hollo, what does this mean?" he asked, calling Uncle Billy's attention to it.

Then the landlord had to explain in regard to the odd coincidence—how two L. Hands had arrived in Caddoville within a few hours of each other, and related the mistake that Senator MacMurphy had made in thinking that the first man, the planter, who was in search of a location, was the detective whom he expected from New Orleans.

"A very natural mistake," the doctor observed.

"Yes, but when the real detective came along anybody, who had any sense, could see the difference between the two," the landlord declared.

"I only hope he will be successful in capturing this scoundrel," the doctor remarked. "It will make us men in the parish who have something to lose breathe easier."

"That's so, sure as you're born!" Uncle Billy declared.

"Although I, in common with some of my neighbors, with whom I have discussed the matter, have an idea after making so great a haul the fellow would not be apt to stay in this district, but would cut and run with his plunder as soon as possible."

"Wa-al, doctor, I will allow that in my opinion the cuss would try to play a game of that

kind," the landlord remarked after thinking over the matter for a few moments.

"That was the decision we come to after discussing the matter fully. Senator MacMurphy is going in to leave no stone unturned to capture the fellow, and it does not seem reasonable for him to remain here and risk being captured, when he has secured money enough to make him a rich man for the rest of his life."

"That is so."

"Of course we may be wrong, but that is the conclusion we come to, and if I was MacMurphy I would widen the scope of my search far beyond Caddo parish."

"Oh, I reckon he has done that," Uncle Billy replied. "I heered say that he was trying fer to cover the bull country. A reward ov twenty thousand dollars, you know, will be apt to make every chief of police and detective in the country keep his eyes open."

"Very true; by the way, have you a late Galveston paper?"

"Yes, you will find one over on the table yonder."

The doctor was soon absorbed in the contents of the paper, and guests demanded Uncle Billy's attention.

In about half an hour the bogus detective made his appearance, and Kingsland, having finished his newspaper just at the same time, was introduced to the tragedian by the landlord.

The doctor expressed his pleasure at making the acquaintance of so renowned a gentleman, and inquired in regard to the chance of catching the rascal who had plundered MacMurphy.

The actor imitated the oracular manner of the average detective to the life.

He had "secured a clew"—there wasn't much doubt that in a short time he would have the rascal safe in jail; of course, under the circumstances, he could not say much, but everything was all right and working as well as could be expected. This was declared in an extremely mysterious manner, interspersed with undry nods and winks, and he wound up by inviting them all to take a drink with him.

Just as the party ranged up at the bar the Lone Hand entered the room, and the actor at once called to him to join the party.

He complied, and was introduced to Kingsland, and then, after the liquor was dispatched, the doctor and the Lone Hand fell into conversation, Kingsland remarking that he understood he was in search of a plantation.

The Lone Hand replied in the affirmative, and then Kingsland invited him to take up his quarters with him for a while, saying that there were three or four places in his neighborhood which could be had cheap.

The new-comer accepted the invitation in the same frank and hearty spirit in which it was tendered, and it was arranged that the doctor should come for the Lone Hand on the following day, then Kingsland took his departure, the actor also leaving.

"A little clew I must look after," he said in the most mysterious way.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE KINGSLAND FAMILY.

"I TELL you what it is, you are in luck!" Uncle Billy Coffee announced to the Lone Hand when the departure of the others left him free to speak.

"Yes?" said the Lone Hand, in a tone of question.

"You kin bet your bottom dollar you are!" the landlord declared.

"Doctor Kingsland is one of the leading men in the parish, and when he takes a stranger under his wing it is a mighty good recommendation for him."

"I am glad to hear it."

"You will find the doctor to be a first-class gentleman, and though you might not think to find an A No. 1 doctor up in a country district like this hyar, yet folks who have traveled, and know all about it, say that you can't scare up a better doctor in Orleans or any other of the big cities."

"Well, he certainly looks like a man of intelligence and information."

"Oh, he is!" the landlord declared. "He has traveled a heap, too. He studied for a doctor down at Orleans, and then he went to England and to France, and to Germany, and studied for 'bout five years."

"After such a course of study he ought to be well up in his business."

"Yes, you bet! And he did it jest for fun, too, as he wasn't obliged to do it. You see, the old man, his father, General Jack Kingsland, was one of the richest men in the State, and all there were to inherit the property was the doctor and his elder brother, Robert. Bob, as we allers called him, didn't take to study at all, but ran the plantation."

"Y-e-s, I see."

"When the general died he divided his property equally between his two sons, only he left the plantation to Bob, but gave money enough to the doctor to make up for it."

"The doctor was in Europe at the time of his death—away off somewhere in Roosia, I have

heerd—and so he didn't get the news of his father's death until some time after it happened, and then he didn't come back to this country until a couple of years afterwards.

"I don't know as it is right to say anything 'bout it," the host remarked in a mysterious way, slightly lowering his voice, "but folks do say that the doctor jest made the fur fly in foreign parts arter the death of the old man, when he had all the money he wanted ter spend."

"Well, having plenty of money, I suppose it was only natural that he should go in for a good time."

"Yes, but they say that he went in for a bu'ster. Folks from Orleans met him, and they allowed that he was throwing his money away, jest as if he was one of them Eastern kings with half a dozen gold-mines at his back."

"Oh, well, such stories are generally greatly exaggerated, you know."

"Wa'al, I reckon that this time the yarns were pretty near the truth, 'cos Bob Kingsland began to git frightened, and he let on to a friend of his—who let it out, of course—that if the doctor kept on as he was then going, it would not take him long to run through his money.

"We reckon hyer, you know, that the doctor was calculating on coming in for Bob's money one of these days, for Bob was 'bout fifteen years older than the Doc, and as he hadn't got married, most folks thought he never would, for he was a regular old bachelor, but he astonished all of us one day by marrying the daughter of his next neighbor, Cornelia Hazelburst, a gal nearly twenty years younger than himself, and 'bout ten months afterward Bob was killed while on a hunting excursion by the accidental discharge of a gun."

"That was unfortunate."

"You had better believe it was. The widow pretty nearly went crazy. The doctor was summoned home, for Bob lived long enough after the accident to make a will, in which he left all his property to his wife and baby-girl, who was born jest before the accident, and appointing the doctor to be the executor.

"But before the doctor arrived the wife died too; she never really recovered from the shock of her husband's death, so when the doctor came he took possession of the plantation, and brought up the leetle gal, Pearl, she is called, jest as keerfully as if she had been his own child."

"Then the doctor was not quite so wild as he was reported to be?"

"No, I reckon he turned over a new leaf when he came back to his own country; anyhow, he has been as straight as a string as far as any one knows. He likes a good drink, and can carry off considerable liquor, but no more than a gentleman should, and he is fond of a game of poker, too, and bears the reputation of playing the boldest and heaviest game of any man in the parish, but that ain't anything ag'in' him, you know."

The Lone Hand nodded assent to this statement.

"Thar's only one p'int that anybody kin make ag'in' the doctor," the host remarked, after a brief pause, just as if he had been debating in his mind whether it was wise to tell all he knew or not; but talkative men, of the landlord's stamp, fond of gossip, are seldom able to resist the temptation to tell all they know, and it was so in this case.

Now the Lone Hand was not particularly interested in Doctor Kingsland's history, still he always made it a rule, when engaged upon a case, to pick up all the information he could in regard to the inhabitants of the district where he was located, for experience had taught him that often valuable information was gained from such loose and apparently unimportant gossip.

"Well, I am really curious to know what that point is," he remarked, "for the doctor seems to be such a fine man that I should think it would not be easy for any one to make a point against him."

"Thar's a leetle bit o' mystery 'bout the thing, and that is what kinder makes people talk," the landlord remarked, his tone lowered, and his manner extremely confidential.

"That is natural."

"Oh, yes, and thar isn't but a few of us know anything about the matter, and we keep quiet, 'cos it would be apt to make the doctor wrathful, I reckon, if he knew his business was being talked about."

"Very likely."

"The thing is jest hyer: every once in a while the doctor scoots off down to Orleans, and is gone for three or four weeks at a time; important business he gives out, but a few of us, who think we know a thing or two, are of the opinion that the doctor goes off on a first-class, bu'st, the biggest kind of a spree, you know, and that is the reason why he is able to keep straight up hyer."

"That seems reasonable; I have known men of importance and influence to do just such things."

"Of course it is only a suspicion, and, mebbe, it ain't so at all," the landlord added.

"That is true; it is possible that it is business which calls Mr. Kingsland to New Or-

leans. If I understand the situation rightly he has the care of his ward's property in addition to his own, so he has a good deal to look after."

"Yes, you are right thar," Uncle Billy admitted. "Good judges, who are posted, reckon that Miss Pearl is worth pretty close to a hundred thousand dollars."

"That is a large sum, and I should think that it would make the young lady decidedly attractive to the gentlemen of Caddo parish."

"I reckon it does, and then too, the gal is as pretty as a picture, and educated way up to the nines! But she is young yet, only seventeen, and the doctor is rather opposed to her having fellows running arter her. He allows that in two or three years it will be time enough for that, and so he kinder throws cold water on any matrimonial scheme."

"I think he is right," the Lone Hand remarked.

"Yes, most of the people agree with him, although there is one fellow who is dead struck after Pearl, and he thinks the doctor is the worst kind of a tyrant."

"That is extremely natural, and I have no doubt that he thinks he could take care of the lady, and her property, just as well as the doctor," the Lone Hand observed.

"Oh, you kin bet he does, and between you and me, and the bed-post, I reckon he could, although the doctor don't appear to think so."

"Who is the gentleman?"

"His name is Thomas Sumpter, and he is a lawyer; a mighty nice young fellow, too; he is from South Carolina; comes from one of the first families there, but hasn't got any rocks to back him. His folks were all ruined by the war, and he came out hyer to grow up with the country. He is as smart as a steel-trap, and although he ain't got no practice to boast on yet, you kin bet your bottom dollar that he will get that in time."

"He can afford to wait then a little while."

"I reckon he will have to wait a durned long time before the doctor gives his consent for him to come courting the gal!" Uncle Billy exclaimed.

"Is that so?"

"You better believe it is! The doctor don't like Tom Sumpter for a cent!"

"Does he object to the man because he is poor—does he regard him as a fortune-hunter?"

"Wa'al, I don't know as it is that exactly, but he has taken a dislike to him, somehow, and isn't willing to admit that there is any good in him. Most folks think the doctor is a little unreasonable, and thar has been talk that thar might be trouble between the two, but so far they hain't even had any words."

The Lone Hand had listened patiently to the gossip, although, apparently, it had no interest to him, but he was destined to be brought into the matter, as the reader will see anon.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TRAGEDIAN'S REPORT.

A COUPLE of hours after the time when the conversation related in our last chapter took place the Lone Hand sat in the hotel office reading a newspaper and the actor entered.

His face was flushed and although he did not stagger, yet the Lone Hand got the idea that he had been drinking freely.

Mr. Montague marched into the apartment with an air full of importance, looking neither to the right or left, walked over to a table; sat down, drew a pencil and a memorandum-book from his pocket, and then, with knitted brows, like a man who carried the weight of a nation upon his shoulders, fell to writing.

There were a half-a-dozen people in the room, clustered by the bar, conversing with the landlord, and they all gazed with interest upon this impersonation of mystery.

"That's the big detective from Orleans," Uncle Billy Coffee remarked in a hoarse whisper, although there wasn't any need of the landlord's volunteering the information for there was not one in the party who did not know all about the stranger. In fact, few people were there in Caddoville who were not acquainted with the supposed detective and the business which had brought him to the town.

"I reckon from the way he is going on that he has struck something," the landlord continued, and then the rest nodded their heads and looked wise.

But the Lone Hand was not deceived by this show of activity. He understood that it was but a piece of acting. The tragedian was carrying out his idea of how a detective ought to behave.

For a few minutes the group at the bar watched the tragedian with open mouths, and he, with a keen eye to the impression he was producing, busied himself with his memorandum-book; then the townsmen got into conversation among themselves and the tragedian improved the opportunity, seeing that he could do so without being seen by the others, to convey to the Lone Hand an intimation that he wanted to speak to him.

The detective answered with a nod, then laying down his newspaper he strolled out of the room.

"He wishes to communicate to me the result of his interview with Senator MacMurphy and

the lawyer, I presume," the Lone Hand remarked, as he proceeded up-stairs to his room.

"I shall be able to discover whether any trust can be placed in the man or not, for, of course, he cannot be aware that I overheard every word that was said, and therefore will immediately be able to detect him if he keeps back any part of the conversation."

After gaining his room the Lone Hand had not long to wait before the tragedian made his appearance.

He came in without knocking, in the most approved melo-dramatic style; then went on tip-toe all around the apartment, looked into the wardrobe and under the bed as if he feared that there might be some eavesdropper concealed within the room.

"Don't be alarmed, there is no one here," the Lone Hand remarked.

"Ah, but 'tis as well to be always sure," the tragedian replied, and then, striking a position in the middle of the room, he spouted, in a stage whisper, "'From this nettle, danger, we will pluck the flower safety!'

The Lone Hand nodded and waved his hand to a chair as an invitation to the other to be seated.

He did not attempt to hurry the actor; it was his custom when he met an odd genius of this kind to allow him to go on in his own way.

With a dignified bow the tragedian sunk into a chair.

Even in performing a common action of this kind this "child of genius," did it with the air of a tragedy king, ordering a culprit to execution.

"Well, sir, I have seen these gentlemen," the actor announced.

"So I supposed."

"And now listen to my plain, round, unvarnished tale—give me your ears!"

"Go ahead."

The tragedian obeyed the injunction and faithfully related the particulars of his interview with MacMurphy and Judge Waldron.

Of course, he elaborated and put in all sorts of fanciful figures of speech; he was so impregnated with the atmosphere of the stage that it was not possible for him to ever forget that he was not on the boards impersonating some character.

The Lone Hand listened patiently, allowing the actor to go on in his own way, only speaking once in a while to make clear some doubtful point.

"There, the tale is told!" the tragedian exclaimed, finally. "And I think I have succeeded in giving you the conversation almost word for word."

"As far as I can see you have performed the task in an admirable manner."

"Well, yes, I flatter myself that I have done the trick pretty well, but more remains behind!" and the tragedian spoke in a deep tone, assuming a mysterious air.

"What is it?"

"After ascertaining these facts I made up my mind to make a little tour of the town for the purpose of seeing if I couldn't pick up some additional knowledge," the actor explained. "By assuming the character of a detective I supposed I became possessed of the professional instinct which the able detective is popularly supposed to have—the bloodhound-like skill of being able to follow a scent."

The Lone Hand nodded.

"I reasoned in this way: this mysterious marauder who is posing as the Bad Man of the Big Bayou, or the Black Terror, as I have heard some call him, is a first-class scoundrel, a man of vast ability in the rascal line, or else he would never have been able to collar this fifty thousand ducats so skillfully and I never met a man of genius in that line in my life that was not addicted to the pleasure of the flowing bowl."

"Yes, I believe that is one of the peculiarities ascribed to genius."

"Oh, there is no mistake about it; the fact is undoubtedly. Nearly all the brilliant stars who have electrified the world, have been notorious for their love of the wine when it is red, heroes, statesmen, judges, poets, authors, actors, musicians; in fine, all men who by the force of genius have shot up like beacon-lights above the common herd."

"It is a popular belief whether it be true or not."

"No doubt about its truth!" the actor asserted positively. "But to return to our mutton."

"As this marauder has shown himself to be a man of genius, I argued that he was therefore sure to be fond of liquor and if he visited this town I would be apt to find traces of him in some of the liquor saloons."

"Your reasoning seems to be sound, only from what I have learned of the man it does not appear probable that he is a common fellow who would be apt to hang around a saloon," the Lone Hand observed.

"That point is well taken I will admit, but if you have ever been intimately acquainted with any of these geniuses you will understand that a great many of them, particularly those fellows who abuse the gifts which Heaven has bestowed upon them, by using their talents for unlawful purposes, are men of very ordinary acquire-

ments outside of the one particular line in which they are strong."

"Yes, I believe that is the case."

"At one time in my life, while I was acting in Chicago I became acquainted with a young man who stopped at the same hostelry which I honored with my presence; a very ordinary young man he appeared to be, chiefly remarkable for the quantity of liquor which he could get away with without its making him drunk. I am pretty good at that sort of thing myself, but I couldn't hold a candle to this fellow. He pretended that he was a clerk, but turned out to be one of the biggest cracksmen in the country, and while he was apparently loafing around Chicago, waiting for a job, he and his confederates were putting up a scheme to rob one of the biggest banks in the metropolis of the West, and they worked the trick to the queen's taste."

"They cracked the bank and got away with the boodle, and neither money nor men were ever taken either."

"I am wandering from the subject, but I merely mentioned this circumstance to show you how I came to look for my man in the gin-mills of this delightful burg."

"Yes, I see."

"If you remember, I expressed an idea of going in for this big reward myself, but when I came to think the matter over I arrived at the conclusion that it was out of my line, and although I might plug the detective very well as far as procuring evidence goes, yet, when it came to snapping the bracelets on the wrists of a desperate prisoner I might not be able to perform the task with the grace, ease and celerity which such an occasion demands, so I made up my mind that if I struck a clew I would turn the matter over to you, trusting that you would do the right thing by me if the information proved to be valuable."

"I certainly will; only too glad to do it!" the Lone Hand exclaimed.

That was my idea and it flashed upon me the moment I stumbled upon a clew."

"Did you succeed in finding one then?"

"I did, most noble satrap, I did!" and then the tragedian glared around him in a mysterious manner and, dropping his voice to a whisper, said:

"Do you think it is perfectly safe for me to speak?"

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

"No danger of my being overheard?"

"Not the slightest!"

"Then, 'I will a tale unfold which will harrow up thy young soul!' Brace yourself!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

▲ NOTABLE CHARACTER.

"I AM braced all right; go ahead!" commanded the Lone Hand.

"I presume you have noticed that for a small place Caddoville is well provided with saloons? There are two besides the one in the hotel here, and how they manage to live is a mystery!"

The other nodded.

"The hotel bar-room is, of course, all right, a respectable place as bar-rooms go, but the other two gin-mills are tough. I have seen some dives in my time—it is my boast that I can drink with any tinker in the country in his own language—but these two Caddoville shebangs beat the deck! But having got the idea into my head that in one of these places I could succeed in getting a clew to the man I was after I braved the danger of getting poisoned with their vile liquor."

"You ought to be pretty well seasoned by this time," the Lone Hand remarked, a sly twinkle in his eyes.

"Ah! touch me not too nearly!" the tragedian exclaimed. "Well, to tell the truth, I reckon, as these Southwesterners say, that it would have to be pretty bad whisky to upset me, for I am a veteran and though no lawyer, yet I can boast I have practiced before a goodly number of bars in my time."

"No doubt."

"Well, to resume my tale, the first dive was a negro den, and in there no information did I secure, although in that open-hearted manner, characteristic of a noble youth about my size, I stood treat for all in the place."

"You cannot expect to keno every time," the Lone Hand remarked.

"Very true, a great truth tersely expressed. In the second dive, which was a shade better than the other, the Red River Saloon, kept by a bulldog-like fellow known as Buck Wendel, I struck pay-dirt, as a miner would remark.

"There wasn't any one in the saloon when I entered, so I invited the proprietor to have a bowl with me. He complied; I set 'em up twice and then he set 'em up, after that he grew confidential, told me he knew the lay I was on and asked if there was anything in the affair for a man who could give a clew which might be worth something."

"I judged from the man's manner that he meant business and was not indulging in any idle talk, so I told him promptly that a big stake could be made by a party able to put the bloodhounds of the law on the right scent."

"How much?" he asked.

"A thousand dollars if the big reward can be captured," I answered.

"That was a liberal offer."

"Big baits catch big fish, you know," the actor responded with a wise look. "Then he asked if the party giving the information could keep in the background so as not to be known in the transaction, and I responded that such an arrangement could be made; it was the information I was after, not the man; and now, to come right to the point, there used to be in this neighborhood a fellow of bad character known as Jim Duffy, Yellow Jim Duffy he was usually called, because he was a yellow-skinned chap, and it was commonly believed that he had negro blood in his veins, though he denied it, saying that his father was a Mexican. He was also called Poker Jim on account of being an inveterate gambler."

"This fellow used to hang out at the Red River Saloon, and the proprietor made no bones in saying that he was a rascal of the first water, and would as soon kill a man, even for so small a sum as ten dollars, as to look at him."

"A regular Southwestern cut-throat; I recognize the tribe," the other remarked.

"About six months ago, in a fit of generosity, Buck Wendel lent Yellow Jim fifty dollars, Jim being broke and anxious for a stake. Jim represented that if he had fifty dollars he knew of a chance to make a big haul."

"The saloon-keeper let him have the money and Jim promptly disappeared, and from that day to this Wendel has never seen him; but he heard he was in town the other night patronizing the rival saloon and spending money freely. He was evidently flush—had struck a streak of luck somewhere, for he had a pocket full of gold."

The other emphasized the word and the detective nodded to show that he appreciated the point.

"The saloon-keeper naturally felt angry when he heard this news; it was hard enough for him to lose the fifty dollars without having his debtor add insult to injury by spending his money at a rival house; and in order to get square was why he suggested to me that Yellow Jim was just the kind of a man who would be apt to play the role of the Bad Man of the Big Bayou."

"And the fact of the fellow being reported as having a pocketful of gold at once led you to the belief that there might be something in it," the Lone Hand remarked.

"Yes; of course the saloon-keeper was not aware that the robber had succeeded in changing the greater part of his booty into gold; but being a shrewd fellow, he surmised that that was what the marauder had done and said as much to me."

"It looks as if there might be something in this matter," the Lone Hand observed, reflectively. "Although I calculated that the man who had been skillful enough to work these really extraordinary jobs was a cut above any such common rascal as Yellow Jim."

"Yes, that is true, and that idea occurred to me, but when the remembrance of that Chicago affair came to my mind, and I reflected what a really dull customer that first-class cracksmen apparently was, the thought came to me that Yellow Jim might be like him, a commonplace fellow seemingly, but in reality a genius in one particular line."

"True, there's reason in that."

"Most certainly it appears to me as if the clew was worth following. Yellow Jim has been absent for about six months; it is almost six months ago that the Terror first appeared, and now, after this last operation, through which the robber secured a big sum in gold, Yellow Jim makes his appearance in Caddoville with his pockets full of gold. It may be only a coincidence, you know, but, 'trifles light as air are to the jealous mind confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ!' That does not exactly fit, but that is the idea you know."

"Does this Yellow Jim make Caddoville his headquarters?"

"Not now; he used to, but at present he has given Caddoville the shake and hangs out somewhere around Old Monterey, a town to the north."

"Yes, I know the place."

"I learned this from the saloon-keeper. The Red River shebang-man is boiling over with rage on account of the mean way in which Yellow Jim has treated him, and, he told me, he reckoned he would never see his fifty dollars again, but he would do his best to get fifty dollars' worth of revenge, and so the moment he learned that Yellow Jim was in town and so flush that he was putting up drinks for the crowd at the rival saloon, Buck set spies to work to find out all they could in regard to Yellow Jim; but the only facts of importance that they were able to learn was that Jim had his pockets full of gold, boasted that there was plenty more where that came from, and had his headquarters at Old Monterey."

"I will take an early opportunity of looking after this Yellow Jim," the Lone Hand remarked. "I am going up toward the Old Monterey neighborhood. One of the plauters, Doctor Kingsland, has invited me to pay him a

visit and I start to-morrow. His place is on the Old Monterey road."

"You will be in just the right position to make inquiries then, and no one will be apt to suspect your game. Oh, by the way, keep your eyes open, you know, if you succeed in running this Yellow Jim to earth for he is a desperate cuss and bears the reputation of having killed about as many men as he has fingers and toes," the actor warned.

"I generally keep a good lookout and am not often caught napping," the Lone Hand replied.

"Suppose I learn any other facts of importance, how will I be able to communicate with you?"

"Oh, I will be in town every two or three days, and if the matter is, in your judgment, so important that I ought to be immediately summoned, get a horse and ride out to the doctor's plantation. Feign that you are a little unwell, a fever or something of that sort, and that you have come for his advice; I will understand that you want to see me and will find an opportunity to converse with you in private."

"All right and as the king doth wisely say:

"Since so far fair be done,
Let us not cease till all our own be won!"

And then the tragedian marched majestically from the apartment.

The Lone Hand meditated over the information which he had received from the actor for a few moments.

"It hardly seems to me as if a man of the Yellow Jim stamp could have carried out these bold and really wonderful robberies," the detective murmured.

"Is it not more likely that he is but the confederate—the tool of some abler man who has managed to keep in the background? But if he is, by getting after Yellow Jim I stand a chance to discover the principal."

Nothing of importance occurred during the rest of that day, and about eleven o'clock the Lone Hand went to bed, taking care to see that his door and window were securely fastened.

The night passed quietly away, and early in the morning the man-hunter arose.

A slip of paper on the floor, which had evidently been shoved through the keyhole, attracted his attention. On it was written:

"Adieu! I go, but not of mine own accord. Life is sweet therefore I slope! Keep your weather eye open! Ware hawk! Come, bird, come. Thine ever, HAMLET, THE DANE."

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE ROAD.

In the words of the immortal William, Avon's bard, "it required no ghost to come from the grave to tell" the Lone Hand that the eccentric actor was the author of this peculiar screed.

"Now what the deuce does this mean?" he exclaimed after he had perused the paper. "I go, but not of mine own accord." That means he has cleared out but has been forced to take the step by some one else. "Life is sweet, therefore I slope." That is, he is afraid of being killed if he remains, but he expressed no such fear during our conversation yesterday, although from the fact that he turned the information concerning Yellow Jim over to me, it is plain that he shrank from the task of following up the clew. In fact, he said that it was not exactly in his line, but he never intimated that he was not inclined to go on. I suppose he has meditated over the matter, and come to the conclusion that there is too much risk about the affair to warrant his keeping on. He warns me to keep my weather eye open and to 'ware hawk; those expressions are mere theatrical figures of speech, I presume. It is very odd though."

The Lone Hand dressed himself and proceeded to breakfast. After the meal was over he got into conversation with the landlord, and from him ascertained—being careful not to betray any particular interest in the subject—that the detective had settled his bill and departed on the early morning train.

"I reckon he has struck a trail and has gone to look after it," Uncle Billy Coffey announced. "I tell you, I reckon what them ar' detectives don't know ain't worth knowing!"

The Lone Hand agreed to this, and laughed in his sleeve at the ease with which men can be gulled.

About nine o'clock Doctor Kingsland made his appearance.

He found the Lone Hand all ready for a start.

"We will get off then at once," the doctor said, "but we will have a glass of wine first. I make it a rule never to take anything stronger than wine until about noon. This idea of bracing up with whisky and cocktails the first thing in the morning is, in my opinion a pernicious practice; I don't know as I ought to speak against the practice though, for there isn't any doubt that it puts a good many dollars in my pocket. Men get their stomach out of order and then have to come to me to doctor them up."

"Why, doctor, we would be all laid up with the chills and fever if we didn't b'ist in a leetle whisky the furst thing in the morning!" the landlord declared.

"Oh, it is all very well for you, Uncle Billy, to say that; you are looking out for your bar profit, and that is where your chills and fever theory comes in," the doctor rejoined.

This raised a laugh at the landlord's expense, although he protested that it was not so.

Then, as a matter of news, Uncle Billy told the doctor about the detective's departure, adding that he "s'posed" the bloodhound had struck a trail.

"No doubt of it," the doctor remarked. "I only saw a little of the gentleman, but he struck me as being a particularly able man, and when a first-class detective gets after a rascal like this Bad Man, he generally succeeds in catching him; that is, unless the scoundrel takes alarm and runs, and even then the detective usually hunts him down."

"That's so, sure as you're born!" the landlord declared.

"The trouble is that in this Terror's case we have never had a first-class man on the track of the rascal," the doctor remarked. "We have been trying to catch him with amateur detectives, and that is the reason why the fellow has been able to laugh at us. In a matter of this kind it takes the professional thief-catcher to do the work, just the same as amateur doctors get along very well if the case is not a serious one; but if it is, then the regular professional must be called in or the patient dies."

The rest all agreed that the doctor's reasoning was sound; then there was another glass of wine all around, and this being disposed of, Doctor Kingsland and the Lone Hand mounted their horses and set out.

On the way the conversation turned naturally to the mysterious marauder, but it was the doctor who began it, for it was the policy of the Lone Hand never to lead off in a matter of this kind.

In fact, the man-hunter allowed his companion to do about all the talking, merely putting in a few words now and then, to keep the conversation going.

The Lone Hand was in hopes to gain some information of value, but he soon saw that it was the same old story; Doctor Kingsland merely repeated what the detective previously had heard.

The only new fact was that the doctor had put his house on the defensive, expecting that the midnight marauder might pay him a visit.

"The people of this section have an idea that I make an astonishing amount of money by my practice," the doctor explained. "In fact they look upon me as a millionaire, but it is far from being the truth. My practice is an extensive one, but cannot be called good, for the most of the patients are extremely poor people, and it is a sheer impossibility to collect anything like a decent fee out of them; but nevertheless the idea is abroad that I am an extremely wealthy man, and from the time that this mysterious robber commenced his operations I have been expecting a visit, and so prepared to give the fellow an extremely warm reception."

"Possibly the rascal got wind of your preparation, and that is the reason why you have not been troubled," the Lone Hand suggested.

"I should not be surprised, for it has been my opinion, right from the commencement, that the robber never makes a move until he has carefully examined the ground."

"It certainly seems so."

"Yes, or otherwise he would not be so successful."

"That is a fact; he has never made a move yet that he did not succeed in carrying off the plunder."

"And that shows, to my thinking, beyond a doubt, that his plans are all carefully prepared in advance," Doctor Kingsland remarked. "I should not be at all surprised if the fellow has examined my premises, and if he has done so, two facts would be discovered by him. In the first place, I and my people are on the alert for an attack, and in the second I keep no amount of money in the house calculated to attract any light-fingered gentleman, and if you have noticed how this fellow has been operating, he has never made a move without having a large amount of plunder in sight."

The Lone Hand remarked that it seemed to be the case.

The two had been riding along at a good pace during this conversation, and at this point the doctor observed that they were now only a short quarter of a mile from his plantation.

Just as the remark dropped from his lips a horseman rode around a bend in the road, some few hundred paces on.

He was a young, good-looking fellow, well-dressed, evidently a gentleman, with black hair and eyes, and a dark skin; a fine type of a true Southern gentleman.

He was mounted on a blooded bay horse, and riding onward at a slow pace.

The moment that Doctor Kingsland beheld the new-comer his face became dark with anger, and, involuntarily, he tightened his rein, thus checking the speed of his horse, and his right hand was thrust behind him, in the direction of his pistol-pocket, as if to grasp a weapon.

And the moment that Doctor Kingsland per-

formed this maneuver the horseman executed a similar one, excepting that his hand, instead of seeking his pistol-pocket, was thrust into his vest, and the Lone Hand, an extremely good judge in such a matter as this, calculated that the stranger, thanks to carrying his weapon in this unusual place, would be able to get it out a few seconds before the doctor could produce his, and in an encounter of this kind, a second meant life or death.

In Western parlance the odds were about two to one that the horseman would succeed in "getting the drop" on Doctor Kingsland.

The pair approached each other until only about fifty feet separated them, and then they drew rein, bringing their horses to a halt.

The Lone Hand had maneuvered his steed so as to bring him well over to the left of the road, a good ten feet from the doctor, and a little to his rear.

An old stager in such matters, the detective saw that there was a prospect of a hostile meeting, and he had not sufficient confidence in the marksmanship of the stranger to warrant him in keeping his position by the doctor's side.

From his experience in such matters he thought the chances were great that he would be much more likely to receive the stranger's bullet than his companion, at whom it would be aimed.

For fully a minute after the pair halted their steeds the two glared at each other, but neither made a movement to draw a weapon.

The Lone Hand watched the scene with a deal of interest; being perfectly unprejudiced, having only just made the doctor's acquaintance, and never having seen the other man before, he was well-fitted to be an impartial judge.

It was plain to him that it was Doctor Kingsland who would be responsible for the fight if the two came to an actual conflict, for the stranger, though evidently surprised, and disagreeably so, at encountering the doctor, yet had made no hostile sign until Kingsland slackened the pace of his horse and reached for a weapon, then he had followed suit, as was only natural, under the circumstances; not one man in a thousand would have acted otherwise, and then, too, while the doctor's face was dark with rage, on the features of the stranger was only a look of defiance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PLAIN WORDS.

As the Lone Hand watched the scene the story which the landlord had told him in regard to Doctor Kingsland suddenly occurred to him, and immediately he guessed who was the horseman.

The rider was the young lawyer, Thomas Sumpter, who had fallen in love with Doctor Kingsland's pretty niece, Pearl Kingsland, and thereby incurred the anger of her guardian.

"Well, if the lady has taken a fancy to this gentleman, she certainly shows good taste," the Lone Hand mused, as he surveyed the rider. "He is a fine-looking young man, and has a good face; if I am a judge of character, he is a gentleman, and worthy any woman's love, and I agree with the landlord that it is a mystery why the doctor should object to such a suitor for his niece."

For a good five minutes the doctor and the young lawyer looked each other straight in the eye, but neither attempted to draw a weapon.

Doctor Kingsland, after the first flush of his rage was over, made the discovery which had struck the Lone Hand.

From the fact that the young lawyer—for the rider was Thomas Sumpter—carried his pistol in his vest, while he had his in his pistol-pocket, it was apparent that his opponent would be able to get first fire, and in an encounter of this kind this was too decided an advantage to be thrown away.

And this was why the doctor hesitated. He was not going to commence the fight at a disadvantage, and was racking his brains to conceive some way to place himself on an equality with his antagonist.

But such a thing was not to be.

Sumpter was watching him with the eyes of a hawk; the young lawyer was conscious that he had the other at a disadvantage, and he did not intend to be tricked out of it, yet he acted merely on the defensive, and had not made a movement to draw a weapon until the doctor showed by his actions that he intended to fight.

"Ahal! the doctor sees that the other fellow has the best of it, and he hesitates—sensible man!" the Lone Hand observed, under his breath.

Finding that he could not attack the young lawyer without allowing him a great advantage, the doctor gave up the idea.

With a sullen scowl, he withdrew his hand and rested it upon the pommel of his saddle; the lawyer was prompt to follow his example, thus showing that he was as ready for peace as for war.

"Well, sir, you are about the last man I expected to see up in this region!" the doctor exclaimed, in an angry voice.

"I don't really understand, sir, why that should be the case," the young man replied, affecting to be astonished. "This is as pleasant

a road as any out of Caddoville, and quite a favorite of mine."

"You understand, sir, what I mean!" the doctor retorted. "There is not the slightest necessity for beating about the bush. You know that my plantation is not far away."

"Of course I am well aware of that."

"And you are equally well aware that you are not a welcome guest there."

"Very true; and I assure you, sir, I have not the least idea of intruding where I am not wanted."

"Your evasion does not deceive me!" Doctor Kingsland exclaimed, angrily. "I understand it exactly. You have not called at my house, but you have been in its neighborhood, so as to see and converse with one of its inmates."

"I am not aware, sir, that I have practiced any evasion. I said I had not called at your house; that is the truth. I did not say I had not held speech with any one who resides under your roof."

"But you know very well that I have forbidden that person—my niece, Miss Pearl Kingsland—to have anything to do with you!"

"In regard to that matter you must talk to the young lady," the young man retorted. "I have no control over her actions, nor do I assume to have any; and, Doctor Kingsland, you certainly ought to be aware that you cannot exercise any control over me. If in my rides abroad I happen to meet Miss Pearl, and she chooses to stop and converse with me, I most certainly will be glad to embrace the opportunity."

"Sumpter, I have given you fair warning to keep away from that girl; she is not for you; and if you do not heed my caution, I most certainly will kill you one of these days!" Kingsland exclaimed, in cold, malignant tones.

"Doctor Kingsland, I don't intend you shall get the chance to kill me, if I have any say in the matter," the young lawyer replied, coolly and firmly, without the least trace of bravado, but he spoke as if he meant what he said.

"I do not intend to call you in to physic me, so you will not be able to get a chance at me in that way."

This banter angered the doctor, and he shook his clinched fist at the other.

"When I get you under the point of my dueling pistol, you will find that it is no laughing matter!" the irritated physician cried.

"Yes, but you are not going to get me in any such position," the other rejoined. "I have suspected for some time that that is your game and I have made up my mind that you shall not work it that way."

"Ah, it is as I thought then!" the doctor exclaimed in an extremely contemptuous way. "You do not possess sufficient courage to meet me, yet you dare to come sneaking after my niece and ward, in defiance of my positive injunctions."

"Doctor Kingsland, if it makes you feel any more comfortable to think that way, I am sure it does not matter to me," the young lawyer retorted, his manner equally as contemptuous as Kingsland's.

"Well, sir, as you lack the courage which every gentleman should possess, and fear, like the poltroon that you are, to meet me upon the field of honor, then I shall have to treat you as all cowardly rascals ought to be treated. I shall take a rawhide whip and lash you like a dog!"

"Oh, no, you will not!" the young man retorted, quickly.

"I swear by the Heaven that made me that I will unless you cease to persecute my niece with your attentions!" the doctor declared, hotly.

"I do not doubt that you will try, but you'll find that game cannot be worked. I am not the man to stand still and be thrashed like a dog, as you will speedily discover, if you try to perform the operation. I am more than a match for you, doctor, physically, and if you attempt to assault me the chances are great that I shall be able to take the cowhide away from you and give you a dose of your own medicine, which, most assuredly, I should not hesitate to do."

This declaration so irritated Doctor Kingsland that he made a movement as if to draw a weapon again, but as his antagonist was equally as quick, the doctor reconsidered his determination and withdrew his hand.

"I am a gentleman, sir," the doctor said, with a great effort repressing the rage that burned within his veins so he could speak calmly, "and a street contest is something which I would avoid if possible. It is not seemly for a man in my station to engage in such a thing, like a pot-house brawler. I have just cause of complaint against you, and I should like to settle this difference in a gentlemanly manner. I will public insult you the first time we meet in the presence of witnesses, then you can challenge me and we can arrange a hostile meeting, and if on the field of honor I do not obtain full and complete satisfaction I will not complain."

"As I told you before, Doctor Kingsland, I fully understand your game," the young lawyer replied. "You simply want a chance to assassinate me. You want me to challenge you so as to give you the right to the choice of weapons, then you will choose pistols, the old-fashioned dueling tool with which you have been practic-

ing for years, so that you are a dead shot, bearing the reputation of never having missed your man. Under cover of the forms of a duel you will be able to make sure of killing me without my having any chance for my life.

"I am of the new generation. I never fired a dueling pistol in my life, although with a revolver I am counted an expert shot, and I should not hesitate to meet you with that weapon but for one thing."

"You lack the courage, eh?" cried the doctor with a malignant sneer.

"Yes, I lack the courage to break a promise that I have made. Your niece sent me word that she wished to see me. I came and found her in a dreadful state of mind. Some indiscreet friend had told her that there was a probability of a duel between you and myself and she vowed to me that if I agreed to a hostile meeting with you she would never speak to me again."

"Ah, yes, I see, you are sheltering yourself behind a woman's petticoats!" Doctor Kingsland exclaimed, sneeringly. "And the only thing for me to do is to publicly post you as a cowardly cur, unfit to associate with gentlemen, and that will end your career in this region, I reckon."

"I anticipated that you would try something of that kind and told Miss Pearl so. Your game would either be to kill or drive me away, but she was as obdurate and as little inclined to listen to sense as women generally are in such cases, but in the practice of my profession as a lawyer I have learned how much truth there is in the timely old saying, that there is more ways than one to kill a cat, so, apparently making a virtue of necessity, I consented, and told Miss Pearl that under no circumstances would I permit myself to be badgered into a duel with you, and I don't mind telling you, Doctor Kingsland, for it is my desire to be perfectly frank in this matter, that she on her part agreed to become my wife the very day she attained her majority and was free to act for herself."

The doctor gave a snort of indignation at this.

"But to return to my explanation," continued Sumpter. "Finding that Miss Pearl, with that charming inconsistency so characteristic of her sex, would not understand that I could not stay in this section if branded as a coward, which I most certainly would be if I refuse to fight you, I tried a little strategy.

"I said to her, 'Pearl, you are exposing me to the risk of being killed in cold blood by your guardian; when he finds I will not fight he will seek me out in Caddoville and murder me.'

"Her woman's heart was touched at once, and the pride and courage of her race roused.

"Oh, I do not mean that you shall allow yourself to be killed like a helpless animal without lifting a finger in defense!" she cried. "If you are wantonly attacked you are at perfect liberty to defend yourself, and if you kill your assailant I shall not hold you to blame!"

Doctor Kingsland gritted his teeth together; he was almost beside himself with rage upon thus being informed how cleverly the young lawyer had managed the affair.

"Now, then, after this explanation, I suppose you understand the situation," Tom Sumpter remarked, in his cool and quiet way. "I cannot accept any challenge to a duel from you. If you insult me in public I cannot challenge you, but I shall try to give as good as you send; I shall say I am armed and countless so are you. If you want satisfaction, out with your weapon and we can settle the matter at once. This is too fast an age to bother with the old-fashioned dueling business. I am here in Caddoville, you know where to find me, and I am ready for you at any time; you can begin as soon as you like."

"After such a blast as that it is not likely that any one will dare to apply the term, coward, to me!"

If eyes could kill, Doctor Kingsland most certainly would have slain the young man on the spot, but as it was he glared at him in impotent, baffled rage.

He realized that the young lawyer had succeeded in getting the best of it.

Doctor Kingsland was of the old school, a mighty man with the long-barreled, hair-trigger dueling pistol, but he could not boast of any particular expertness with the revolver, while he had heard Tom Sumpter spoken of as being an excellent shot with that weapon.

In a street contest then the odds would be against him, and the doctor was one of those methodical, scheming men who always desired to be sure that the advantage was on their side before they went into anything.

"You have planned very shrewdly indeed, sir," the doctor said at last, a very iceberg in his manner, "but before we get through with this affair you may discover that other men can plan as well as you."

"We will proceed, Mr. Hand."

Then the doctor rode on, closely followed by his companion.

The young lawyer also started his steed; the two passed each other with cold nods and the interview ended.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HEIRESS.

"THIS young man has placed me in a very disagreeable position," Doctor Kingsland explained to the Lone Hand when they were around the bend.

"My niece, and ward, is a wealthy girl and I have been trying to save her from this young man who is nothing more or less than a fortune-hunter. He wants the girl's money, not the girl. I am satisfied too from what I have heard of him that his character is bad; he is a gambler and a reprobate, but the scamp has managed to secure such a control over the girl that I doubt whether I will be able to prevent her from making a fool of herself the moment she comes of age."

"Such a state of affairs is unfortunate," the man-hunter remarked.

"Well, after she is of age, it will be her own lookout of course; I shall wash my hands of the matter. I do not doubt that the scoundrel would like to provoke me into attacking him, thinking there would be a good chance to settle me in a street fight and then there would be no barrier to his marriage with the girl. He will fail there though; I shall not throw my life away."

"It would not be wise."

The Lone Hand spoke as though he sympathized with the doctor, but in reality he did not.

He was not satisfied with the explanation that the other had given.

The mind of the Lone Hand had been trained to the detective business so thoroughly that even in a case of this kind, which did not concern him at all, he immediately fell to speculating in regard to it.

There was a mystery in the matter, evidently.

He knew from what he had heard in the town that the doctor's statement in regard to the young lawyer's character was not correct; his reputation was as good as any man's in the town, although he was not rich, but that was no disgrace, for few men in the district were.

The doctor was prejudiced, of course, but mere prejudice would hardly cause him to be so violent about the matter, for the Lone Hand was already satisfied from what he had seen of Doctor Kingsland that, although he evidently possessed a violent temper, yet he had it well under control, and was not a man liable to give way to fits of blind, unreasoning anger.

"If he were my foe I should be more apt to dread his secret, underhand work, than his open anger," was the conclusion that the Lone Hand reached.

A few moments more and the pair rode up to the Kingsland Plantation.

It was a handsome place with a goodly mansion, all verandas and windows, in the Southern style.

The Lone Hand was ushered into the drawing-room by the doctor and there introduced to Miss Pearl Kingsland, a tall, regal-looking girl, with the blackest of eyes and hair; a true type of the far-famed Southern beauty.

She was an intelligent, lady-like girl, and a pleasant hour was spent in social converse.

During the conversation the Lone Hand studied the girl intently without apparently paying any particular attention to her, and he soon saw that despite her efforts to appear unconcerned and at her ease, she was greatly troubled.

"Poor girl! I suppose the thought that her guardian and her lover may at any moment become engaged in a contest which may end in the death of one or both of them is ever present in her mind," the Lone Hand mused.

Then the lady retired to prepare for dinner, and the doctor escorted his guest around the plantation.

The Lone Hand was amazed; he had seen some rich plantations in his time, with good stock and tools, but he had never inspected one on such an elaborate scale as the doctor's.

Evidently a vast amount of money had been expended upon it.

By the time the inspection was ended dinner was announced, and the meal was served in a style which made the Lone Hand stare.

No stranger was the man-hunter to good society, and in his time, in the wealthy East, amid the "bloods" of New York, he had assisted at affairs where money had been spent like water to afford pleasure to the invited guests, but here, amid the wild scenes of the rude Southwest, on the very verge of civilization, he was treated to a repast fully equal to anything that he had ever seen anywhere, a regular course dinner with the finest of wines and an army of well-trained blacks to serve.

At first the Lone Hand was under the impression that this was something extra gotten up in his honor, though why the doctor should go to the trouble for him, an entire stranger, was more than he could say.

But after a while he became satisfied from the clock-like way in which everything proceeded that this dinner was nothing out of the common.

After dinner Miss Pearl begged to be excused as she had a call to make upon the ladies on the next plantation; the gentlemen adjourned to the veranda, where a cigar was enjoyed, the

host producing a box of "Henry Clays," which he assured his guest he had made to order in Havana for his own use.

The cigars were excellent ones; the Lone Hand was not much of a smoker, yet was particular in regard to what he did smoke and it was his judgment that he never puffed a finer weed.

"It is my custom after dinner, and my cigar is ended, to take a nap," the host remarked, as the "weeds" approached an end, "and if you care to indulge in one, you can be shown to your room."

"Thanks, I think the idea is a good one," the other replied.

A black was at once summoned and the Lone Hand conducted to his room; a magnificently-furnished apartment on the second-floor.

There were two full-length windows in the room, looking out upon the veranda, which ran along the eastern side of the house.

The negro, a fat, middle-aged fellow with a noiseless tread, and an extremely polite manner, took a key from his pocket and unlocked what was apparently a small desk, standing in a corner of the room, but when the piece of furniture was open, lo! it was a small sideboard, stocked with wines, liquors, cigars and other essentials, including a tray of imported crackers.

"When you feel like refreshment, sab, you will find it hyer. An' if you want any 'tentation, sab, jist touch de bell. Dere's tings for you too in de closet, sab," and he pointed it out, then bowed himself from the room.

The Lone Hand looked around in wonder.

"Well, upon my word, this really astonishes me! The doctor must be rolling in riches to keep up this style."

He examined the closet. A couple of suits of gauzy texture hung within it. He removed his clothes, hung them up in the closet, then attired himself in the convenient garments, borrowed from the torrid clime of India, and laid himself down.

The bed was so strong of perfumes that it was really oppressive, but soon they produced an effect upon the Lone Hand's senses and he fell into slumber; not an easy one, for he was troubled by dreams, vague, confused, and unpleasant visions, which was strange, for the Lone Hand usually slept like a child, peaceful and calm.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

IT was something unusual for the man-hunter to sleep in the daytime, but, although naturally a man who did not indulge much in the use of strong liquors, yet the host's importunities had induced him to drink quite a quantity of wine during the dinner.

It was, "Allow me to help you to a glass of this chablis, Mr. Hand," or "I want your opinion on this madeira. I can see that you are a man of taste and judgment, and I should be glad to learn what you think of these vintages."

Then the doctor proceeded to explain that he had spent many years in Europe while engaged in the study of his profession, and as he had always been plentifully supplied with funds, never being obliged to deny himself anything that he craved, and being a great lover of wines, although not what could be called a hard drinker in any sense of the word, he had become a connoisseur in them. All his wines and liquors were selected by himself abroad, buying right from first hands, and he declared that it was his opinion there was no better stocked wine-cellars than his in America.

Under the circumstances, the Lone Hand had drunk twice as much wine as he really wanted, and so felt inclined to be drowsy after the dinner was ended.

In an hour though the influence of the alcohol had passed away and the man-hunter awoke with a sudden start.

The slumber had not done him any good, for he was in a cold perspiration when he got up.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, as he sat upon the edge of the bed. "I don't know when I have had such ugly dreams! The doctor's wines are to blame for it, I reckon; they are first-class, but a little too rich for my blood, I am afraid.

"I'll get my horse and take a gallop, which will be apt to make me feel like myself again."

He rose and went to the closet wherein he had hung his clothes, and, when he got to it, made a discovery which caused him to halt immediately.

The door of the closet was closed and he was positive that he had left it slightly ajar.

Now it was closed and latched, so that he would have to turn the knob in order to open the door.

The Lone Hand was not a man who could make any mistake about a thing of this kind.

"It is very odd," he muttered, "the door was not closed when I laid down, yet now it is. There isn't any wind to blow the door shut. What does it mean?"

"Has some one been in the room while I slept?"

Immediately he examined the doors and windows. All were securely fastened.

"Well, this is rather odd," he remarked.

"Apparently everything is just as I left it with the exception of this closet door."

"Now, then, the question is, who closed the door, and why was it closed? Some object was to be gained by it, of course, for such things are not done for nothing."

Then the Lone Hand opened the door. None of his clothes showed any signs of being disturbed as far as he could see.

He proceeded to dress himself, and as he put on the garments he examined the pockets for the purpose of seeing if anything in them had been disturbed, but nothing apparently had been touched.

"What little game has been worked anyway?" the man-hunter murmured, as he carefully examined the back and the sides of the closet with a view of discovering if there was any secret passage connected with it, but as far as he could see there was none.

"The only object that any one could have in wanting to examine my clothes would be to discover from my papers what my business was in this district," the Lone Hand mused.

"If any one had a suspicion that I was not what I pretended to be, the thought might have come to the party that by an examination of my papers the truth might be discovered; and if that is the game that has been worked, then the putter-up of the job has only had his labor for his pains, for I am not fool enough to go around with documents in my pocket which tell who and what I am."

"Another point: is this Doctor Kingsland crooked then? That hardly seems within the bounds of possibility, for he is seemingly a man of large wealth, and would have no reason to stoop to crime."

"There are plenty of servants on the place, three white men too; it is more likely that some one of them has put up this job than the doctor himself."

"I will keep my eyes open and see if I cannot spot the fellow. It is strange too that suspicion should be directed to me. I thought when I arranged the little game with the actor that I had put everybody on a wrong scent. It seems though that there is some one with a keen nose enough to detect the right trail. It is strange too that the actor should abandon the business so suddenly. There is a mystery about it, but as he has gone there is no chance for me to find out what it is."

Then the Lone Hand proceeded to the stables, had his horse saddled—the doctor upon introducing him to the hospitalities of his mansion, had announced that he must consider it as Liberty Hall, and act with perfect freedom—and rode forth.

He took the road which led to Old Monterey; it was his idea to proceed well along the road which led to that hamlet and see if he couldn't get some information regarding Yellow Jim Duffy.

He rode for about a dozen miles until he came to where the road forked and at this point was a small plantation.

Seated on an old log by the roadside was a gray-headed, weather-beaten native, smoking a corn-cob pipe.

Drawing a similar one from his pocket the Lone Hand halted and asked the planter if he could oblige him with a light.

The other "reckoned" he could, and after the Lone Hand got his pipe started the native improved the opportunity to ask where he was bound.

The man-hunter explained that he was in search of a plantation.

"Like as not you were arter the Lige Timkins place?"

"Yes, I reckon that was the name."

"Right the other side of Old Monterey?"

"Yes."

"Wa-al, you're too late!"

"Is that so?"

"You kin bet it is! The place is gone."

"Sold?"

"Yes, sab, done sold to Yellow Jim Duffy."

Perceiving that thus by accident he had stumbled on a man who could talk of the party in whom he was interested, the Lone Hand was quick to improve the opportunity.

"Sold to Yellow Jim Duffy, eh?"

"That is w'at I sed!"

"I am too late then?"

"I reckon you ar'."

"Now that is jest my luck!" the man-hunter exclaimed, assuming to be much disappointed.

"According to what I heard, this plantation would have just suited me."

"It is a nice place."

"And Yellow Jim Duffy has got it sure, and no mistake!"

"Nary time! he paid the cash for it yesterday—paid the rocks right down!"

"Well, now you do astonish me!"

"Yes, sab, five thousand dollars in gold—all yellow boys; what do you think of that?"

"I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't got it from a man like yourself."

"It is a sure enuff fact! An' I reckon it will make a good many folks in this hyer section open their eyes when they come for to hear onto it."

"But I say, where did Yellow Jim raise the money? I always heard it allowed that he had to scratch mighty hard for every cent he got."

"He did, stranger, for a fact; that is, he uster!"

"And I have heard too that Yellow Jim has had leetle difficulties with the neighbors about things that they reckoned he had helped himself to without taking the trouble to ask permission."

"That is another sure enuff fact. Oh, that ain't no mistake 'bout it! Jim has been in jail a dozen times, but he allers managed to squeeze out some way or other; they never could prove nothing much ag'in' him. But he is all right now; he has got the solid stuff, and don't you forget it!"

"But where did he get it?"

"Stranger, I reckon I will never tell yer," the other replied. "That is, not until I know a heap sight more 'bout it than I do now. Jim is mighty close-mouthed 'bout it. I had a talk with him yesterday. It war the furst time I have seen him since he came back; he has been away for a while, you know."

The Lone Hand nodded, apparently as much interested in the matter as though he had been one of Yellow Jim's neighbors for years.

"You hev' struck rich, I heern', I sed to him. 'I'll allow that I hev', he let on. 'Whar did ye make yer raise?' Then he laffed and kinder shook his head as much as to say, 'Don't ye wish ye knew?' 'It was in Mexico, I heern,' I sed. 'Wa-al, Mexico is as good a place as any for a man to strike it rich, if he has the luck, an' that's all I could git out of him."

"I suppose Mexico is about as likely a place as any," the Lone Hand remarked, reflectively.

"Yes, I reckon Jim got a job with some of those cattle-thieves along the Rio Grande. I have hearned that they make big money sometimes, an' I s'pose Jim was lucky enuff to get in for a big stake, an' then had the sense for to dust out for hum so as to salt some on it down."

"Is Jim at the Timkins place now?"

"No, but he is gwine to take possession tomorrow."

"I reckon I will have to ride up and see how he gets along after he gets settled."

"Wa-al, Jim is a nice feller arter you git to know him, but he is likely to be kinder rough with strangers."

"Much obliged for saving me the trouble of riding up there."

And then, with mutual salutations, they parted.

The Lone Hand took the road back to the plantation.

"Yellow Jim is the man I want, I reckon," he mused. "All the signs seem to point that way."

CHAPTER XXIX.

BALDY SMITH.

THREE days passed away, and during that time the Lone Hand had not been idle, although he managed his business in such a quiet way that it would have been a keen one indeed to suspect that he was measuring and weighing the men who dwelt on the Kingsland Plantation.

The doctor had put him on the track of three places in the neighborhood which were in the market, and the man-hunter inspected them with as much earnestness as though he really did desire to secure an estate, and these visits gave him an opportunity to talk with the men on the plantation. He was apparently anxious to get their opinions in regard to the value of the places, and in these conversations he had an opportunity to see what the men were like.

Within the three days the Lone Hand completed his examination, and extremely unsatisfactory it was, too.

There was not a single suspicious circumstance about any of the men on the place, from the doctor downward.

The Lone Hand would not have been so careful in this examination had it not been for the closet incident, which had led him to believe that some one had examined his clothes while he slept.

Gradually the man-hunter began to come to the belief that he was mistaken about the closet episode.

"It is possible that the wine had more influence over me than I was aware of at the time, and that I really did close the door of the closet, and my suspicions in regard to the matter are unfounded.

It seems strange that a trifling incident of this kind should worry such a man, but it did, and far more than the detective would have been willing to admit.

The longer the detective remained at the doctor's mansion, the greater became his astonishment at the style in which the owner lived. It is safe to say that no millionaire in the country lived any better. He had his servants trained after the European manner, and the service and the table were simply perfect.

Upon complimenting Doctor Kingsland one day—the Lone Hand was careful not to say too much, nor to betray that he had ever been used to a luxurious style of living and so reveal that he was not the plain, simple planter which he assumed to be—Kingsland replied that he had lived so long in Europe, and become so accus-

tomed to the ways in which Europeans of fortune lived, that he could never content himself with the semi-barbarous style prevalent in America.

"I reckon it must cost you a heap of money," the Lone Hand remarked.

Then the doctor explained that it was not a question of expense, but of knowing how to do it, all depending upon things being conducted upon a regular system.

This was reasonable enough; but for all that, the Lone Hand believed it must cost the doctor an enormous sum to live.

On the afternoon of the third day the man-hunter had strolled up the road on foot, just to pass the time away, and as he got beyond the boundaries of the doctor's plantation he encountered a stranger, who halted as he approached with the evident intention of speaking.

He was a rough-looking, middle-aged man, shabbily dressed, one of the class whom the negroes in the South, before the war, used to contemptuously term "poor white trash."

"Good-evening, sah!" said the stranger, as the Lone Hand came up to him.

[The afternoon is usually termed evening in the far South.]

The detective returned the salutation.

The stranger examined him with a curious eye for a few minutes, and then exclaimed:

"I reckon, now, that you ar' the man I want to see."

"Maybe I am."

"Ar' you Mister L. Hand?"

"Yes, that is my name."

"Ar' you the detective from Orleans?"

"Oh, no, that gentleman is in Caddoville, or was; I believe he has gone away now. I'm a planter, looking after a place."

"I see—I see," responded the other, nodding his head wisely. "A cuss in this world heers so many yarns that it ain't allers easy fer me to git at the rights of a thing. You ar' stoppin' at Doctor Kingsland's, ain't ye?"

The Lone Hand answered in the affirmative.

"So I heerd, but I didn't know whether to take any stock in the story or not. One feller 'lowed that you was the detective, an' t'other cuss sed it warn't no sich thing. Fu'st man sed you were roostin' with the doctor, second man sed it warn't that way at all."

"Well, I am not the detective, and I am stoppin' with the doctor."

"I see—I see. How ar' you fixed?" asked the man, abruptly.

"Eh?" questioned the other, rather at a loss to guess what the fellow was driving at.

"Hey you got all the rocks you keer fer?"

"All the ducats, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, I reckon not. I reckon I could take care of a few more without being greatly troubled."

"Same way with me. Ar' you open fer to go inter a speculation?"

"That depends upon what kind of a speculation it is."

The stranger cast a searching glance around him.

The pair were standing at a point in the road where they were surrounded on all sides by open fields.

"I reckon that if I spit out w'ot I want to say, that isn't no great danger that anybody will hear me," he observed.

"Well, I should say that you can speak without danger of being overheard."

"So it 'pears to me; but, I say, I'm a heap sorry that you ain't the detective."

"What difference does it make to you?" the Lone Hand asked.

"Wa'al, w'ot I am gwine to propose is a thing that a detective would be mighty glad to go inter," the man explained.

"Yes, I see; well, I am sorry that I am not in that line."

"Oh, I reckon you kin fill the bill all right. I s'pose you don't know who I am?"

The Lone Hand shook his head.

"My name is Baldy Smith; I am pretty well known in this hyer destrict," the man explained. "Maybe you have heerd of me?"

"Yes, I think I have."

And this was true; the man-hunter had heard of Baldy Smith—in fact knew all the facts in regard to the fellow that were known to the men on the plantation.

Baldy Smith had been mentioned as being an associate of Yellow Jim Duffy, a man of bad character, and suspected of being at the bottom of about all the mischief which took place in the neighborhood.

Therefore, when the man announced who he was, the intelligence, coupled with his previously expressed wish to meet the detective, made the Lone Hand hopeful that he was about to receive news of importance.

"Wa-al, I reckoned you must have heerd on me, 'cos I'm one of the best-known men on the Caddo!" the other announced with considerable pride.

"Yes, I heard them allow that you were pretty well known," the Lone Hand remarked, a little evasively. He refrained from telling the fellow that all who had spoken of him had declared he was one of the biggest rascals in the

parish, and, if he had met his deserts, ought to have been hung long ago.

"An' now, to coine right down to business, this byer w'ot I'm goin' to tell yer is strickly confidential, yer know, and if yer don't keer for to go inter it, ye'r' not to give it away to anybody."

"Oh, that is all right! You can depen'l upon me."

"Wa-al, now, the thing is jest byer," and the other lowered his voice a little, as if afraid of being overheard, although there wasn't any danger of such a thing. "Mebbe you heerd of Yellow Jim Duffy?"

"Yes, I had an idea of looking at the plantation which he just bought."

Baldy Smith closed one eye and winked with the other mysteriously.

"Yellow Jim is jest rotten with money now."

"Yes, so I understand."

"Got lots of gold, an' is a-slingin' it out as keeless as though he owned the mine whar it come from."

"I believe so."

"Whar did he make the raise?"

"Well, I reckon that Yellow Jim is the only man that can answer that question; but some folks say he has been down to Mexico, and has been mixed up with the cattle-thieves on the Rio Grande."

"Nary time!" Baldy Smith exclaimed, decidedly. "I know better than that."

"Where did he get his ducats from, then?"

"Oh, I don't know for certain, in course, but I reckon I kin guess at it, but one thig I know and that is that Yellow Jim ain't been away from this byer Caddo destrict."

"Is that so? Why everybody supposed he had been away for the last six months."

"I kin give you a leetle light on that ar' subject," the other replied. "For six months Yellow Jim has been biding up in the swamps at the upper end of Lake Caddo; for why? 'cos he had a fuss with Foxy John, the crazy-feller who spends 'bout all his time huntin' 'round the lake."

"The crazy loon swore he would shoot Yellow Jim on sight, an' though Jim is no coward an' never was known to take water afore, yet he didn't dar' to give Foxy John a chance at him an' so he took to the woods."

"Yes, I see, but how is it that he is out now?"

"Foxy John is dead; died a week ago with a fever, an' that is why Yellow Jim is 'round ag'in, but he didn't make his raise in Mexico, 'cos he hain't been out of the destrict."

"I reckon I know what you are driving at," the man-hunter remarked. "You think that Yellow Jim is the Bad Man of the Big Bayou?"

"Now, ye'r' bittin' it plum center!" Baldy Smith cried. "That is where be gits his money from, an' if we kin trap him we kin git the big reward. I'm down on Yellow, I am! I used to be a pard of his'n, but when I went to see him t'other day, he called me a drunken thief an' ordered me off of his place; sed he would hoss-whip me like a durned dog if I dar' to come thar ag'in, an' so I'm goin' in for to salivate him."

"I'll be glad to go in with you, but we have got to get some proof or else we can't do anything."

"I'm jest scouting 'round. I'll strike something pretty soon an' then I'll let you know."

Then, after making an arrangement for another meeting, the two separated.

"I reckon Yellow Jim is my mutton," the detective remarked.

CHAPTER XXX.

GUARDIAN AND WARD.

THE interview which Doctor Kingsland had with the young lawyer, Thomas Sumpter, disturbed him materially, for it revealed to him that there was a complete understanding between the young lawyer and his beautiful ward, that is if he could believe what Sumpter said.

"It may be possible that it was all a bluff on his part to cause me to relax in my opposition," he murmured as he meditated upon the subject.

"If he could induce me to believe that he and Pearl had come to a perfect agreement notwithstanding my opposition, he may have reckoned I would think it was useless to bother myself about the matter.

"I must have a talk with the girl and see what her sentiments are. If his statement was the truth—if she has given him her word to become his wife when she attains her majority, there will be little use for me to attempt to make her change and withdraw her pledge.

"I know the girl's disposition; like the majority of her sex, she is impatient of contradiction and if I attempted to oppose her marriage with Sumpter it would only make her the more determined to have him.

"It is one of those cases where strategy not open force must be used.

"If I could have succeeded in my design to embroil the fellow in a quarrel, and got him to have met me in a duel, I would have made short work of him, but he was smart enough to penetrate my design and baffle me. In a street fight the advantages would be on his side and it is not my game to bring on a hostile meeting unless I can have everything my own way."

"I will sound the girl; see how she feels, and then, if I find that she really is determined to marry Sumpter, I must set my wits to work to contrive some way to prevent the union; secret cunning must do the work since open force cannot be brought to bear, for at all hazards the pair must not come together."

And the peculiar way in which Doctor Kingsland set his teeth together, as well as the look of determination which appeared on his face showed how resolute he was in this purpose.

Going in search of Pearl, he found her upon the veranda, engaged in some fancy work.

Taking a seat by her side he chatted with her upon different matters for a few moments before proceeding to the subject uppermost in his mind, then, at last, he remarked:

"On my last visit to Caddoville I heard some gossip concerning you, Pearl, which rather astonished me."

"Indeed? what was it?" asked the girl, striving to appear calm, for she had a presentiment that an unpleasant explanation was at hand.

"The talk was in regard to you and this young lawyer, Thomas Sumpter."

"Yes?" The girl bent over her work, and a tinge of color appeared in her pale cheeks.

"It is a matter of common gossip that you and Sumpter are engaged, and folks seemed to be considerably astonished when I told them that it was news to me, for I knew nothing whatever about the matter. Of course, as your guardian, I ought to have been one of the first to be informed regarding the matter. I said it was evidently mere idle gossip and there was no truth in the report. That is so, Pearl, isn't it? You are not engaged to Tom Sumpter?"

To a question put thus directly the girl felt an answer must be given, and although she would have preferred not to have discussed the matter with her guardian, as she feared that it would lead to an unpleasant scene, yet, under the circumstances, there was no other course open to her.

Woman-like, though, she evaded a direct answer.

"I do not understand how any such gossip could have arisen," she remarked, "although I presume it is only natural that the relations between myself and Mr. Sumpter should be made the subject of gossip. Caddoville is like all small villages, there are a lot of people who have so little business of their own to attend to that they cannot resist the temptation to concern themselves with their neighbor's affairs."

"That is true, of course; Caddoville is noted for its gossips, and many of them, when they cannot find anything to talk about, will invent tales concerning their neighbors, so as not to be without subjects upon which to converse.

"It is not true then—you are not engaged to Tom Sumpter?"

"Well, to answer you frankly, uncle, although I suppose it can hardly be called an engagement, yet Mr. Sumpter and myself have undoubtedly come to an understanding," the girl answered, somewhat embarrassed, but nervously herself to face the ordeal.

Doctor Kingsland shook his head gravely, and an expression of sadness appeared upon his features.

"My dear girl, it is as I feared then," he observed, slowly, much more in sorrow than in anger.

"Do you think now that you have really treated me rightly in this matter—to come to an understanding with this young man without consulting me? Remember, that I occupy a father's position, and surely you could have done me the poor compliment of asking my advice on the subject."

Pearl was amazed by the manner in which the doctor spoke, for she had expected an outburst of anger; she knew how violent he sometimes became when everything did not go to his liking, and this unexpected mildness astonished her.

"Well, sir, I suppose I ought to have spoken to you on the subject," she admitted. "But I feared it would give rise to an unpleasant discussion, and I shrank from it. I know that I ought not to—that it was cowardly, for an explanation must come some time, and it did not help the matter any to postpone it; it was an error on my part; I admit it freely, and I was foolish not to have a talk with you about the matter right at the beginning."

"Yes, I think that would have been the best course to have pursued," the doctor remarked.

"I suppose I might offer as an excuse that I did not know my own mind," the girl said, slowly. "When Mr. Sumpter began to pay me attention I was not sure whether I would ever care anything for him or not; then too, I knew that you and he did not get on together and I feared that you would object to his suit."

"I should have objected, most decidedly!" the doctor exclaimed. "Not on personal grounds, my dear Pearl, I want you to understand; oh, no, not at all! though the young man and myself have been anything but friends for a long time. At one period he was my lawyer, but we had serious differences so I was obliged to sever our relations. Of course, I am satisfied that he abused me greatly, and if I had not felt that it

was beneath me to attempt to call him to an account, most certainly there would have been serious trouble between us."

"Well, I was aware, sir, that you were not on friendly terms, but I did not know the cause," the girl remarked.

"In looking back at the matter, now that time has elapsed, and the heat of my anger has cooled, I am satisfied that I did exactly right; and now understand, Pearl, my objections to Mr. Thomas Sumpter, when he appears as a suitor for your hand, do not arise because we are not on good terms, but because I do not consider him worthy to be your husband."

"I supposed that it was because you were not friends," the girl remarked, considerably astonished at this statement.

"No, that is not the truth, although I will admit that fact would not incline me to favor him, but my objections have more weight to them than could be given by mere personal enmity. I repeat, I do not think Mr. Thomas Sumpter is worthy to be your husband."

"Indeed, sir, you surprise me!" Pearl exclaimed. "He bears an excellent reputation."

"I am afraid not" the doctor replied, with a grave shake of the head. "You know Pearl, in the pursuit of my profession I ride all over the parish, and so have an opportunity, enjoyed by no other man in the neighborhood, for getting information, and I have learned some things in regard to this gentleman which do not prepossess me in his favor."

"Yes, but is it not possible, uncle, that the people who spoke to you against Mr. Sumpter were aware of the fact that you were not on good terms with him, and so pandered to your prejudices?" the girl asked, with all a woman's shrewdness.

"Well argued, Pearl, but such is not the case, I am satisfied. When I heard that Sumpter was paying attention to you, I took pains to find out all I could about him. Now, of course, you will not believe it, but it is my duty to tell you. You are nearly of age now and in a short time will be your own mistress, free to do as you like, and as my control over you expires so soon I shall not attempt to use any harsh measures to keep you from engaging yourself to Mr. Sumpter. All I ask is that you will be content to wait until you are of age and not marry him in disobedience of my commands."

"You need have no fear on that score!" the girl exclaimed, promptly. "That is the understanding between Mr. Sumpter and myself. There is no engagement between us, because I did not think that I ought to make an engagement, which I knew you would not approve, while I was under age and your ward, but I promised him, on certain conditions to be fulfilled by him, that when I attained my majority I would give a favorable answer to his suit."

"The scoundrel spoke the truth then," was the thought that flashed through Doctor Kingsland's mind.

"So you see I meditate no open act of disobedience," Pearl remarked.

"I am very much obliged to you, my dear girl, for your consideration for my feelings," the doctor remarked, in his blandest way. "All I ask is for you to wait. I would freely give my consent to the union if I could do so with a clean conscience, but I cannot."

"You must remember that you are a wealthy heiress, few women in the State worth more money than will come to you on the day that you attain your majority; now, from the best information I can obtain, this young lawyer is nothing more, nor less, than a fortune-hunter. It is your estate that attracts him, not your own beautiful self."

The girl made a gesture of disbelief.

"Now, my dear, be patient and allow me to state my side of the case," the doctor urged. "I may be wrong—I do not profess to be infallible—but I am acting according to the most trustworthy information I can procure. I suspected Mr. Sumpter to be a fortune-hunter, and I am credibly informed that he is a man whose morals are not what they ought to be. He is a heavy drinker, and, rumor declares, a persistent and unlucky gambler. Then, too, there are whispers that he has had three or four love affairs in the neighborhood of Caddoville which are not at all creditable to him."

Again the girl shook her head; her faith in her lover was too great to be shaken by any vague reports of this kind.

"To my thinking, the evidence is strong in regard to these matters, and that is why I am opposed to Mr. Sumpter paying you attention while you are under my care."

"When you are your own mistress, then it is another matter. You can do as you like, and no blame can attach itself to me; but while you are my ward, I cannot permit you to receive Mr. Sumpter's addresses."

"Of course, under the circumstances, it would not be pleasant to have Mr. Sumpter come to the house; but, uncle, do you forbid me to see the gentleman at all?"

The doctor meditated over the question for a few minutes before he replied.

At last he said:

"Well, Pearl, I will frankly say that, as I feel about this matter, if I could keep you and

Mr. Sumpter apart, I would gladly do so. You see, I am frank with you; but I understand how it will be if I should attempt to stretch my authority to cover that point.

"Youth is willful and bound to have its way. If I should use a guardian's authority and forbid you to meet this Mr. Sumpter, you would be apt to consider me a cruel tyrant, and the chances are great that the command would be disobeyed.

"Now, I am not anxious to assume the *role* of a tyrannical guardian, nor to put you in that of a rebel, so I will not attempt to prevent you from seeing this gentleman.

"Under the circumstances, I cannot receive him here; it is utterly impossible; but if in your daily rides you meet Mr. Sumpter and converse with him, why, I am not supposed to know anything about it, and if the fact should be brought to my knowledge by any officious neighbor, I shall simply say: I have perfect confidence in my niece and ward, and feel sure she will never commit any act to bring scandal or disgrace upon the name she bears."

"You may rest assured of that, uncle!" exclaimed the girl, proudly.

After a few more unimportant words, the interview terminated.

A great weight was lifted from the girl's mind, for she had not anticipated that the doctor would take the matter so calmly. The insinuations which he had made against the young lawyer produced no effect upon her, for she had the most perfect faith in the man she loved.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LONE HAND IS SURPRISED.

To the interview between the doctor and his ward there had been a listener; the Lone Hand had overheard every word.

It was by accident, and not through design, that he had played the eavesdropper.

The interview took place upon the veranda, and the man-hunter had sat beneath it, scanning a late New Orleans newspaper, to which the doctor was a subscriber.

The first impulse of the Lone Hand was to rise and retreat when he discovered what course the conversation was taking, but as he could not perform this maneuver without revealing to the pair that he had overheard the first part of the conversation, and as there was really nothing particularly private about the matter, the detective decided to remain where he was.

And so it happened that he overheard all that was said.

He did not arrive at the same conclusion regarding the doctor as the well-satisfied young lady.

In her innocence she had thought the doctor had made a partial surrender—a compromise at all events, but the wily bloodhound, used to reading the secret thoughts of man, and who was never satisfied with the outward seeming but always looked beneath the surface, knew better.

"This Doctor Kingsland is an extremely shrewd schemer," he muttered to himself, after the interview had ended.

"He is a much shrewd man than I gave him credit for being. He knows very well that he couldn't prevent the two from meeting, and so he concludes to wink at it.

"His object is to gain time; evidently he has been afraid that the young lawyer might persuade his ward to elope with him, and he went to work to spoil any trick of that kind. He has succeeded, too. The girl thinks he has made a great concession, and so she freely agreed not to take any step in opposition to his wishes until she is of age. That is two or three years off, I should judge, and in two or three years much may happen.

"The points that the doctor made against the gentleman, though, made no impression upon the lady. Her faith was not shaken in the least, although when she comes to brood over the matter, in her hours of solitude, as women are apt to do, some effect may be produced.

"He gained his end, time; that was what he was after and he attained it.

"Now, if I was Sumpter, I should be on the lookout for fear that the doctor might play me some trick, for it is evident to me that Kingsland is no mean general in a matter of this kind.

"He managed the girl beautifully, and she had no suspicions that the doctor gained all he sought."

By this time Pearl came to the end of her fancy-work and left the veranda, so that the Lone Hand was free to depart.

Having nothing in particular to do, the man-hunter sauntered over to the stables with the idea of getting his horse and going for a ride.

He kept on the move as much as he could, and never failed to get into conversation with all whom he encountered.

His search for a plantation afforded a convenient excuse.

The Kingsland place, like all the big Southern plantations, had plenty of help; in fact, to the eyes of a stranger, there were two men to do one man's work, all blacks, of course, with the exception of the overseers.

The Lone Hand therefore was considerably surprised when he reached the stable to find a white man attending to the horses.

And such a white man! A more disreputable, ragged bummer of a tramp was never seen!

He was rather short and stoutly built; his face was red, like that of a man who had drank a deal of liquor in his time, the chin was covered with a bristle-like growth; a shock of yellowish hair covered his big head, and, altogether, he was as tough a locking customer as the man-hunter had ever met in all his travels.

"Hello! what are you doing here?" the Lone Hand asked.

"Hi ham a-cleanin' the 'osses, don't ye see?" the man responded, with a respectful pull at the broken old wreck of a hat which covered his head.

"How's that? Where is Jupe?"

This was the negro who usually attended to the horses.

"Blast my bloody hies if I know!" the other responded. "I s'pose as 'ow 'e is asleep, somewhere, don't ye know?"

It was plain from the man's accent that he was an Englishman—a Londoner evidently judging by the way in which he misused the letter H.

"Have you taken service here then?"

"Hany port in a storm, yer 'onor!" the other answered. "You see before you, sir, a wreck—a hawful wreck!" the man continued, striking an attitude.

"Hi am an Englishman, a blasted long way from 'ome, yer 'onor, and without a solitary bob in my pocket. I'm on a tramp, 'oping to get to New Orleans, but I 'ad 'ard luck, an' when I axed the black gentleman fer to give me a morsel to heat, for I ain't 'ad anything but blackberries for two days, he says as 'ow if I wants for to stop and do chores 'round the stable 'ere for a few days 'e would see that I 'ad plenty of grub, and maybe a bit of cash to 'elp me on my way."

"Ah, yes, I see."

This was a negro trick all over, shirking work and getting some one else to do it.

"I 'ope yer 'onor won't 'ave no objection to a poor man, w'ot is a long way from 'ome, a gettin' a bite of summat to heat, when 'e is willing to work 'ard for it?" the tramp pleaded.

"Certainly not; although I am not the owner of the place; the plantation belongs to Doctor Kingsland, but he will not be apt to trouble you," the Lone Hand replied. "There is enough to eat, and to spare here, and one more mouth will not make any difference. I do not doubt too, if you speak to the doctor, that he would do something for you; that is if you are fit for any better work than helping around a stable."

"Well, to tell yer the 'oly truth, sir, I don't know much about 'osses," the other replied. "But as I sed, hany port in a storm; I was about starved, and was glad to get hany thing to do. Hi'm a bookkeeper, hi am, but I am rather down in my luck now," and the man surveyed himself with a melancholy air.

"You see, sir, I will hown up; I ham rather too fond of my beer and too much beer don't do a man no good, don't you know?"

"That is true."

"But I say, sir, I think as 'ow I've seen you before!" the tramp exclaimed, abruptly. "My name is Robert Bristol, but all my pals allus calls me Bristol Bob."

The Lone Hand surveyed the man intently for a moment, then shook his head.

"Well, there is something familiar in both your name and face, but I can't seem to place you."

The man approached closer to the man-hunter and with an entire change of voice and manner said:

"I'll call thee King, Hamlet, father, rogue, Dane!"

The Lone Hand was astounded.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STRANGE TALE.

THE man-hunter had been surprised quite a number of times in his life, but never much more so than by this discovery.

The English tramp was the tragedian in disguise.

The Lone Hand cast a hasty glance around as if he wanted to be sure that there was no one near to play the eavesdropper.

"Oh, that is all right!" the other exclaimed in a confident tone, understanding the meaning of the glance. "There isn't a soul in the place; the nigs left me to do the work, and every mother's son of them have cleared out, so you need not be afraid of anybody playing the spy upon us. Now by the great horn spoon, I swear to you, my noble lord, that I do tell the truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me gracious!" continued the other, dropping into his absurd theatrical way and striking an attitude.

"Well, you are about the last man that I expected to see."

"Exactly, I don't doubt it," replied the other with a good-natured grin. "You thought I had deserted you."

"I did."

"You got that little note that I poked through the keyhole?"

"Yes."

"And were considerably astonished, of course."

"I was, indeed."

"That was written in a hurry—thrown off upon the spur of the moment, so to speak, but I was in a hurry to catch the coach, you know, and so did not have much time to consider the matter. After I got on board the vehicle though and was well under way—as it happened I was the only passenger, so I had ample opportunity for reflection—I came to the conclusion that I had not expressed myself as plainly in my brief epistle as I ought to have done."

"I understood that you scented danger and comprehended you wished to warn me to keep my eyes open."

"You got my meaning, I see, but I did not make it clear to you why I took French leave so suddenly, or what danger you were to guard against."

"No, those points were not clear, excepting that from the way you wrote I understood you were forced to depart and did not take the step of your own free will."

"No, I should say I didn't!" the actor exclaimed. "You would be safe in betting all the ducats you have, or ever expect to have, on that!"

"Oh, high and mighty excellency, I have a tale to relate, the strangest that e'er you heard, but sit down and make yourself comfortable," he added, with a sudden change of tone, pushing a box toward the man-hunter.

The Lone Hand took the proffered seat and the disguised actor perched himself upon a barrel.

"Now, then, we will cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war!" the tragedian exclaimed.

"In the first place, when I parted with you on the day preceding the one on the morning of which I took my flight, I made no mention that I had any idea of leaving these gay and festive scenes."

"No, you certainly did not."

"That was because at the time I hadn't the remotest idea of going."

"You changed your mind rather abruptly then."

"You bet, as a Californian would say, and you can depend upon it that I had good reason to change my mind."

"How so?"

"I retired to my couch at quite a late hour, rather mellow, I will admit, for the inhabitants of Caddoville are a jolly lot; they appreciated the honor of having a real, live detective in their town and the way they set up the drinks was a caution.

"Therefore, to keep up the dignity of the profession to which I was supposed to belong—the noble order of thief-catchers—I accepted the hospitality of these good gentlemen of Caddoville as freely as it was tendered, so, as I remarked, when I retired to my downy couch I had all the liquor on board that I could conveniently carry.

"But, as I remarked to you once before, I am one of the men who can drink a deal of liquor without its making a fool of me, so, although I had an unusual cargo on board, I knew perfectly well what I was about. I make this explanation, for I have an odd, peculiar story to tell, and I don't want you to get the idea that I was drunk and dreamed the whole thing."

"I see: go on," responded the other.

"I locked my door, took a look at the window to see that it was all right—it isn't often that I bother myself with any precautions of this kind, for it is but seldom that I have wealth enough in my pockets so as to make me afraid of losing my lucre."

"From the little experience I have had with men in your profession I have no doubt that your statement is correct," responded the Lone Hand with a smile.

"You are right, my lord, for a thousand ducats! We tragedians soar after the infinite, dive after the unfathomable, but are seldom known to pay cash. But, to resume my tale, I went to bed, to sleep, perchance to dream, but I didn't, for the whisky I had drank made me sleep like a top."

"That was natural."

"Yes, you are right. I did not go to bed until after twelve, and I slept for about three hours as soundly as ever I did in my life, and then, I was abruptly awakened by the flash of the light of a bull's-eye lantern in my eyes."

"I sat bolt upright in bed, and soon as I got my peepers open, I made a discovery which made me feel extremely nervous."

"I anticipate what you are about to say: you were receiving a visit from this mysterious robber," the bloodhound remarked.

"Right you are, me noble lord!" the tragedian exclaimed. "The fellow who has been making it so lively for the inhabitants of this section was in my room, as largo as life and twice as natural."

"In one hand he held the bull's-eye lantern, the light of which he was flashing directly in my face, and in the other he brandished about the ugliest-looking bowie-knife that I ever had the misfortune to see."

"Was he dressed as described?"

"Yes, a remarkable make-up; it would make the fortune of an actor in the old style melodrama. In spite of the peculiar position in which I found myself I could not help making a note of it."

"But I did not have much time to think about the matter, for as soon as the mysterious individual saw that I was fully awake, he gave an extra flourish to the bowie-knife and in a hoarse voice said, 'Stranger, are you prepared to die?'"

"Well, that was a leading question, as a lawyer would remark."

"Yes, it led me into a cold shiver!" the actor rejoined, with a grimace. "I give you my word, I felt exactly as if some one was pouring ice-water down my back."

"I do not doubt it."

"Hold on!" I exclaimed, 'gentle friend, I pray thee in good sooth not to be hasty in this matter.' For answer he gave another flourish with the knife, and said: 'I understand that you are the detective who calls himself L. Hand and that your business on the Caddo is to arrest a man about my size."

"Well, sir, to use the old term, I was completely flabbergasted. He had hit me between wind and water, and I didn't know what on earth to say."

"Yes, it seems to me that he did have you in rather a tight place."

"The tightest place that I ever was in; and I tell you, sir, I have met with some remarkable adventures by flood and field in my time."

"Well, under the circumstances, the only chance for you was to make a clean breast of it and explain that you were not the real detective but only masquerading as one," the Lone Hand remarked.

"All that a man hath will he give for his life,' that's scripture and common-sense," the actor remarked.

"Of course, when this disguised desperado announced his intention of carving me with his big knife, because I was the detective, engaged to hunt him down, my first thought was to assure him that it was all a mistake; I was not the detective, but an unfortunate devil of a tragedian, whom cruel fortune had compelled to assume a role foreign to his line."

"Of course, my dear sir, my heart smote me at having to betray you, but, under the circumstances, I saw no other course open to me."

"Oh, I do not blame you at all," the Lone Hand remarked. "As you say, it was the only thing you could do."

"Exactly, but before I could make the confession this disguised marauder fairly took the words out of my mouth."

"You are sailing under false colors," he said. "You are no more a detective than I am, but have been hired to play the part. Now, then, I want the truth out of you at once or I will carve you into mincemeat."

"Ah! I see!" the Lone Hand exclaimed. "That comes from the blunder that Senator MacMurphy made in blurting out my name and business in a public bar-room! It is strange that intelligent men will make such fools of themselves sometimes!"

"No noble and approved good master, it did not take me long to think the matter over, and as I saw the fellow was on the right track, I made up my mind that the best thing I could do would be to own up and tell the truth."

"I was aware that I was betraying the confidence reposed in me by you. My heart fairly bled when I considered that I must repay your kindness by such base ingratitude, but how else to save my precious skin I knew not."

"Oh, it was all right to speak; not one man out of a thousand would have acted otherwise," the detective declared.

"The fellow was on the right track, and no yarn of yours would have sent him on a false trail."

"I am glad you perceive that I couldn't do anything but confess. I told the story, how we met by chance, and you hired me to play detective."

"When I finished he put a single question: 'Have either of you discovered anything?'" "Not a thing," I replied. I didn't believe that he knew I had heard anything about Yellow Jim, and so I kept that back.

"Well, you won't strike anything either!" he cried, 'and now a warning to you: get out of Caddoville the first thing in the morning, and don't ever dare to come here again. Don't betray that you have seen me, or I will hunt you down and kill you like a dog; don't communicate with this detective, but dust out of town, saying as little as possible to anybody. I am going to let you go this time, but I will have my spies keep their eyes on you, and if you attempt to disobey my commands, I wouldn't give a copper cent for your life."

"Well, that was certainly a plain, easily comprehended warning."

"Yes, one that he who runs may read. Well, sir, as you know, I obeyed the injunction and departed. I stood not upon the order of my going, but went. I could not resist the temptation, though, to write a little note of warning to you, stealing forth in the darkness, and poking it through the keyhole of your door."

"Much obliged; you ran some risk."

"Yes, but you treated me well, and I am not the kind of man who goes back on a friend. In fact, my dear sir, during the course of my checkered career I have met with so few friends, that I am inclined to make much of one when secured."

"I had to desert you; there wasn't any other course open to me, but I was determined not to go without giving you a word of warning."

"I am much obliged, and I will try to return the service some time."

"Speak not of it, I pray thee!" the tragedian exclaimed, with a dignified wave of his fat hand. "You have treated me like a gentleman, and when a man acts on the square toward me, I always try to hold my end up, as one of my eminent minstrel brothers would remark."

"I departed; I will admit to you that this Bad Man of the Big Bayou had given me such a scare, that I came to the conclusion to throw up my hand in the game, and have no more to do with the matter, but, in the solitude of the stage, I got to thinking the thing over, and the result was I determined to try and give this masked marauder a Roland for his Oliver."

"I will admit that the twenty-thousand-dollar reward was in my mind, and I reflected that a slice of that sum would do me a heap of good about this time."

"Yes, it would come in quite handy."

"So I doubled about on my tracks. Instead of going to Shreveport, as I had originally intended, I headed for Marshall. Went to the hash-house there where the shark had my wardrobe in durance vile and released some of the things I wanted this wig," and he passed his hand, caressingly, over the shock of hair, which looked so natural that the keenest eyes could not have detected that it was a wig, "and this bummer's costume."

"Attired in these, and with my face skillfully colored, I had no fear that any one would penetrate my disguise."

"It is an excellent one, and you played the part of an English tramp so well that I had no suspicion you were anything but what you seemed; you deceived me completely, and I reckon my eyes are as sharp as anybody's you are likely to run across," the detective remarked.

"I am an actor, and in my time have played many parts, and though my greatest successes have been in the Shakespearian dramas, yet, upon occasion, I can play the tramp and the vagabond as well as any man who ever donned the sack and buskin!" the tragedian exclaimed.

"You certainly played this character to the life," the Lone Hand remarked.

"Well, to come to the end of my tale. In this disguise I made my way back to Caddoville. It was my plan to loaf around the village, get into communication with you as soon as possible, so as to let you know that I was on hand ready for work. I found you had left Caddoville for this plantation; I followed after; succeeded in getting a footing here, and now, I am your humble servant to command."

"Your idea was an excellent one and I have no doubt we can lay this Bad Man by the heels, and if we do, you can depend upon getting a good share of the twenty thousand dollars."

"I suppose I had better remain here for the present?"

"Yes, I am going to look after this Yellow Jim and it may be desirable for you to take up your quarters in his neighborhood."

"I am your slave to command!" the tragedian declared.

CHAPTER XXXIII. THE LAWYER SPEAKS.

THE Lone Hand mounted his horse and started up the road toward Old Monterey.

It was his purpose to call upon Yellow Jim Duffy; the web of suspicion seemed to be gathering around that individual, and the man-hunter was pretty well satisfied that if Yellow Jim was not the disguised robber, he was a confederate, and shared in the spoils, although there was nothing in the affair, so far, to show that the marauder had any assistants.

A short half-mile up the road the detective encountered the young lawyer, Tom Sumpter.

This gentleman was sitting on a fallen tree by the roadside, his horse tied hard by.

"Ah, he is waiting for an opportunity to get speech with Miss Pearl," the detective murmured, as soon as he caught sight of the young man.

And then an idea occurred to the Lone Hand. Might it not be possible to get some important information from the lawyer in regard to Yellow Jim?

The legal gentlemen of a town are usually well-posted in regard to the inhabitants.

Acting on this idea, the Lone Hand drew rein when he came to the young lawyer and exchanged salutations with him.

Sumpter appeared to be a trifle embarrassed; as the other had been a witness to the interview between himself and Doctor Kingsland, of course it was only natural that he should suspect what brought him to the neighborhood of the Kingsland Plantation.

"You are just the man I wanted to see," the detective exclaimed, in his frank, hearty way, and he dismounted from his steed and took a seat on the tree. "I am after a little information, and I think you can give it, that is, if you don't mind."

"I am a lawyer, and lawyers never give anything, you know," the young man replied, with a laugh. "But I guess I will have to make an exception in your favor; so fire away. What is it?"

"I'm in search of a plantation, but the one I was after has just been bought by a Mr. Duffy—Yellow Jim Duffy most of the folks round here call him."

"Yes, I know the man."

"Well, what sort of a chap is he? The place he has taken seems to suit me better than any of the rest I have seen, and I thought I might be able to make a trade with him."

The lawyer shook his head.

"Don't think it can be worked, eh?"

"No, this Yellow Jim Duffy is one of the biggest scoundrels in the Caddo."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, it is the truth; he has been mixed up in all sorts of scrapes, from hog-stealing up to murder; he has been in jail more times than he has fingers and toes, and that he has not been hung or sent to State's Prison for life is because he has had the luck to get juries which contained rascals about as bad as himself."

"He must be a pretty bad character, then."

"Yes, no worse in the parish, as I said, and just now he is a beggar on horseback. In some mysterious way he has contrived to get hold of a good bit of money, and is putting on as many airs as though he owned the whole State. You couldn't do anything with him, Mr. Hand, and the chances are great that if you went to talk with him the low-bred scoundrel would insult you."

"Well, I don't know what this Yellow Jim's reputation is as a warrior, but I don't think he would insult me more than once, unless he is a great deal bigger man than I think he is," the detective remarked, quietly.

Tom Sumpter took a look at the muscular development of the other, and the thought came into his mind that if the stranger's skill was equal to his strength, there were few men on the Caddo who "had any business" with him in a physical encounter.

"Well, I reckon that Yellow Jim would find you a pretty tough customer to handle," the lawyer remarked. "But with such a rascal as he is, it would be knives and pistols rather than fists."

"A regular fire-eater, eh?"

"Yes, he is an ugly customer; not that he is particularly brave or especially skillful with his weapons, but he seldom goes into a fight without starting with the advantage on his side."

"I see, and that helps him to come out on the top of the heap."

"Yes, he is smart enough in his way."

"The fact that he now has plenty of money seems to bother the folks; no one is able to account for it," the Lone Hand observed.

Then the lawyer repeated the rumors in regard to Yellow Jim's having accumulated his money by unlawful transactions on the Rio Grande in Mexico.

"That may be the truth; but from what I have heard of the man I should have thought that people would have suspected he had something to do with these mysterious robberies."

"Oh, no, he would never have the brains or the nerve, to plan and execute a job of that kind."

"You think not?"

"No, the man is a common, vulgar scoundrel; once in a while displays a bulldog-like courage, and a certain amount of low cunning, but not the fellow to fly at any big game."

"He has never been suspected then of having anything to do with the Bad Man business?"

"Oh, yes, he has been suspected," the lawyer replied. "Right at the beginning quite a number got it into their heads that he was the man who got the cash, but when search was made for him, he was not to be found. He had departed before the mysterious robber commenced his proceedings—to Mexico, it was said, and he has only returned within the last two weeks."

Thanks to the information that the detective had received from Baldy Smith he was aware of where Yellow Jim had been during this absence.

"Of course if the man wasn't here he could not have committed the robberies."

"Not very well; then, as I said, the man hasn't the skill or nerve to fly at such high game."

And then, in a sudden burst of confidence, the young man said:

"I suppose you have guessed why I am waiting here?"

"Well, it would not require a man to be much of a prophet, particularly after witnessing a certain interview," the Lone Hand replied with a smile.

"It is the old story of Mahomet and the mountain. If the mountain will not, or, as in this case, cannot go to Mahomet, then Ma-

homet must come to the mountain. As Doctor Kingsland acts in such a manner that I cannot visit his house to see Miss Pearl, she has to ride abroad to meet me."

"That is the way it usually works."

"I suppose though I ought not to speak of this matter to you, for as the doctor's friend you, undoubtedly, will side with him."

"Well, now, really, you are putting it rather strongly. The doctor has been kind enough to invite me to make his house my headquarters but I cannot say that there is any particular friendship between us."

"Are you not an old acquaintance of the doctor's then?" the young lawyer inquired in considerable surprise.

"No, sir, I never saw the doctor, or even knew that he existed, until I met him in the hotel in Caddoville."

"It is certainly remarkable then that he should invite you, a stranger, to his house, for Doctor Kingsland was never known to do such a thing in his life."

"Why, sir, he lives like a recluse and always has; not hardly once a year even does he invite any of his neighbors to his board."

This statement immediately set the Lone Hand to thinking.

Why had the doctor gone out of his way to thus honor him? There was some reason for it, of course, although it might be a mere whim, acted upon on the spur of the moment.

"You astonish me," the detective remarked.

"It is a fact; you are the first stranger that the doctor's roof has ever sheltered to my knowledge. He is no believer in the Southern hospitality which bids a stranger dismount and find a hearty welcome whenever the humor seizes him so to do. He spent all his early life in Europe, and, after the European fashion, stands a great deal upon his dignity."

"How is it that he has such an objection to you?"

"In regard to my coming as a suitor for his ward?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is not so much a personal matter as it would appear at first sight," the other replied. "It has not made the slightest difference to the doctor who the gentleman was; he objects to any one paying his niece attentions."

"Oh, I suppose he thinks she ought to wait until she is of age before she marries."

"That is the reason he gives, but although some other gentlemen besides myself have told him that they were perfectly willing to wait and would not attempt to persuade Miss Pearl to wed until she became of age, he was never willing to permit the girl to receive any attentions."

"The doctor is inclined to be a little unreasonable it seems to me."

The young lawyer surveyed the Lone Hand earnestly for a few moments.

"I don't know how it is, but there is something about you, sir, that impels me to give you my confidence!" Tom Sumpter exclaimed, abruptly.

The Lone Hand laughed.

"Well, if you cannot explain the matter, I am sure I cannot, but you can fire away as soon as you like. I don't mind admitting that I take considerable interest in the matter, and would do anything in my power to serve you and the lady, without, of course, doing anything to injure the doctor whose guest I am."

"Certainly, I understand that. Now I am going to speak in harsh terms of Doctor Kingsland and I want you to weigh my words—sit in judgment as it were, and tell me frankly and honestly what you think about the matter, if you believe me to be in the wrong."

"All right; I will do that, and you shall have as fair and square an opinion as it is in my power to give."

"I'll go back a couple of years and explain to you why Doctor Kingsland and I are not on good terms," the young man began.

"At that time I was his lawyer, and he had complimented me a hundred times upon the manner in which I had transacted his business, but at last there came a case upon which we did not agree."

"To explain my position I must say I received my legal education from one of the most eminent lawyers in the South; a gentleman acknowledged to be without a superior in his profession, and who had, as judge, given perfect satisfaction."

"The one great rule which he impressed upon his students was, never take a case when you are absolutely certain that your client is in the wrong; if there is a doubt, give him the benefit of it, but if you are certain, tell the man so frankly, and let him seek another lawyer if he is determined to go ahead, right or wrong. By acting up to this rule you may not have so many clients, but you will not be so apt to lose cases, and in the long run you will not suffer."

"To that rule I have abided; so, when Doctor Kingsland came to me with a real estate case, the opposing party a widow with a large family of small children, a poor, ignorant woman who did not know her legal rights, and wanted me to undertake it, I explained that he was in the wrong, and if the widow got a lawyer who

knew beans, as the saying is, he would be beaten; he told me to go ahead, secure all the good lawyers on his side, as he was determined to have the property, right or wrong. To speak in plain English, the doctor showed himself to be a low-down, black-hearted scoundrel."

"I was amazed at the discovery, but on account of Miss Pearl, to whom I had just commenced to pay my addresses, I endeavored to get out of the matter as easily as possible, but Kingsland wouldn't have it, and to my utter surprise, gave me to understand that he considered that he had made me, and, therefore, owned me body and boots."

"There's an old expression about getting hot under the collar."

The Lone Hand nodded.

"Well, if ever a man got hot under the collar, I did just about that time, but I kept my temper, only contenting myself by telling the doctor that although I was far from being rich, yet there was not money enough in all Louisiana to induce me to take such a case."

"The doctor departed in a rage, got another lawyer, said I was not able to handle it, and uttered some other remarks reflecting upon my professional skill. My blood was up: I took the widow's case and whipped the doctor with all his lawyers, horse, foot and dragoons."

"No wonder he hates you."

"But why does he object to his niece receiving the attention of other gentlemen, men who have never crossed him in any way?"

"That is a mystery."

"Not to me, for during the past two years I have been looking after the doctor pretty sharply, and I think I have solved the riddle."

The Lone Hand paid the utmost attention, for he had become strangely interested.

"Doctor Kingsland is supposed to be a wealthy man; he lives like a millionaire, is a hard drinker and an inveterate gambler—an unlucky one too; but that doesn't make much difference up in this region, where it is not the rule to play for high stakes, but when the doctor goes to Orleans, as he does twice or three times a year, I have it, from good authority, that he has been known to lose, from five to ten thousand dollars during the trip."

The Lone Hand uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"It would not take him long to get rid of a big fortune at that rate."

"True, and that is just exactly what he has done. His own fortune is gone, and he has used his ward's money, and that is the reason he doesn't want her to get married."

"He doesn't want any husband calling him to an account. As long as he can keep Pearl single he is all right; she has implicit faith in him, and never thinks of asking why he does this or that."

"The doctor brings papers to her to sign, and she does so, hardly ever troubling herself to ask for an explanation in regard to the matter."

"But when the young lady becomes of age and marries, as she will be apt to do, then the doctor will have to render an account."

"That is two years off, and in two years much may happen."

Then the mind of the detective reverted to the interview between the doctor and his ward, which he had chanced to overhear, and he remembered that he had come to exactly the same conclusion as that to which his companion had just arrived.

The Lone Hand thought over the matter for a moment. The young lawyer had unwittingly given him valuable information; why should he not reveal the particulars of the interview which he had overheard?

He decided to do so.

Sumpter was much pleased at this mark of confidence, and so expressed himself.

"It is just as I tell you," he said, after the detective finished. "The doctor is fighting to gain time. He realized that within two years both Pearl and myself may be dead, but the death of either one of us would make him safe."

"I say, you don't really think badly enough of the doctor to imagine that he would try to accomplish your death?" the detective asked.

"Yes, I do!" Tom Sumpter answered, firmly. "I think the man is desperate. I have an idea that his affairs are in a pretty bad state. I know that, some seven months ago, he was very much cramped for money, and some of his creditors were disposed to push him. He contrived to raise funds to pay them off—though at the eleventh hour, as it were."

"Where did that money come from, do you suppose?"

"From his ward's estate; he evidently realized on some of the securities; and one of these days, when he is brought to a reckoning, it is my belief that it will be found there is very little left of the large fortune bequeathed her by her father."

"But during these two years he may be able to make it up."

"It is doubtful, for he is drinking harder and gambling more fiercely now than ever; and when a man once starts on the downward road, he seldom stops until he gets to the bottom."

"True—very true."

"I am on my guard all the time. I don't intend the doctor shall get a chance to assassinate me."

"Do you really think he would try that?"

"Yes, for I believe him desperate. He might not try it himself, but there are plenty of rascals on the Caddo who would kill a man for a good round sum."

"Well, I must be off," said the Lone Hand, rising. "I'm going to see Yellow Jim, anyway."

"Good luck to you!"

The detective made a suitable response and rode off.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

YELLOW JIM.

STRANGE thoughts were in the mind of the detective as he cantered along the lonely road.

"At last I think I have a clew," he murmured. "There are two men against whom my suspicion is directed, but, so far, I have not been able to bring the two together, and yet if I am correct in my guess the pair must be acting in concert."

"I do not wonder that this case baffled all the amateur detectives in this neighborhood. It is as complex and mysterious a one as I ever encountered, and yet I have handled some perplexing jobs in my time."

The horse which the man-hunter bestrode was a good one, and it did not take the detective long to cover the distance which separated him from the "Lige Timkins place" which Yellow Jim Duffy had purchased.

In due time the Lone Hand drew rein at the plantation.

Just before reaching it he had slackened his horse's pace into a walk and carefully examined the pair of self-cocking revolvers which he carried, clicking the cylinders around, so as to be sure these were in good working order.

It was not his purpose to have any trouble with Yellow Jim, but in cases of this kind a man can never tell when a difficulty may arise, and it was the detective's rule to be always prepared.

One revolver was carried in a holster, attached to a belt, buckled around his waist, the other, a small one, was thrust into the bosom of his shirt, resting in a sort of pocket constructed on the inner side.

The Lige Timkins place was a good plantation, and the buildings and fencing were better than the average.

It was in a lonely situation, though, for there was not a house within a quarter of a mile, and right at the back of the place was a great swamp, extending to the bayou which made in from the lake.

As he rode slowly toward the house the Lone Hand noticed how the place was situated, and understood how the peculiarities of the site would recommend the plantation to a man of the Yellow Jim stamp.

"There is a wide sweep of open country, so that the approach of officers could be seen long before they could get at the house," the Lone Hand remarked. "Then, if it was calculated that the force was too big to fight, a retreat could be easily made to the swamp and from there to the bayou, if hot pursuit were given, then, dug-outs could be taken, and further chase laughed at."

"Just the refuge for an outlaw who feared capture."

The house was a story-and-a-half one, much better than the usual run of dwellings attached to small plantations.

In this section two or three hundred acre places were counted small.

The Lone Hand rode right up to the house.

On the front veranda sat three men playing cards at a small table; at another table was a negro boy, engaged in concocting mint juleps as they were called for by the players.

"Well, now, this is what I call luxury," the Lone Hand muttered, as he surveyed the scene.

The three men at the table were all rough-looking, middle-aged men, but one who sat on the right, nearest the table where the negro was preparing the drinks, was much better dressed than the others, wearing a new suit of "store clothes," as well as a "boiled" shirt, and from this circumstance, as well as from the fact that he was a dark-skinned, swarthy fellow, the detective jumped to the conclusion that this was James Duffy, better known as Yellow Jim.

"How are ye?" exclaimed the Lone Hand, as he pulled his steed to a standstill in front of the veranda.

"How d'ye," grunted Yellow Jim, the others not replying, but examining the stranger with a suspicious eye.

"I reckon, if I haven't made a mistake, that this is the Lige Timkins place?" said the detective, imitating to the life the drawling Southwesterner.

"Wa-al, I reckon you hev made some mistake 'bout that, 'cos it ain't the Lige Timkins place now by a long shot!" the other replied.

"Yes, I understand how that is; the place is sold, and I reckon you are the man who bought it."

"You've hit it plum'-center."

"Then you are Mister Duffy?"

"Mister Jim Duffy is my handle."

"Glad to know you. My name is L. Hand."

"Oh, yes, you are stopping with Doctor Kingsland."

"I reckon I am."

"And you are the cuss w'ot the folk reckoned was the detective from Orleans when you first struck Caddoville?"

"Yes, it was a kinder curious mistake."

"I kin tell you, stranger, it was a lucky thing for you that you wa'n't a detective, 'cos this hyer is a mighty onhealthy region for onery critters in that line of business," Yellow Jim declared.

"You bet it is," one of the others added, with an appearance of great fierceness.

"We generally skin detectives up hyer on the Caddo, and feed 'em to our dogs," the third man asserted.

"It is as good as two dollars and a half in my pocket, then, that I ain't the man they thought I was," the Lone Hand exclaimed in a bantering tone.

The three were rather amazed that their words had not produced more impression upon the stranger, and Yellow Jim said, in an ugly way:

"Mebbe you don't believe it, stranger, but it is a sure enuff fact. No detective ever came into this destrict yet, and got out with a hull skin."

"That's so, that's so!" cried his companions.

"Well, gentlemen, it don't matter the wag of a dog's tail to me. I am not barking up that tree," the Lone Hand replied. "I am after a plantation, and had my eyes on this one, but you were a leetle too quick for me."

"Yes, I reckon I was," growled Yellow Jim, who had taken a dislike to this cool, easy-going stranger at first sight, even before he had spoken, although it would have puzzled him to explain why or wherefore.

"I thought I would come up and see you about the place though, thinking that you might be willing to make some kind of a deal."

"I reckon you must take me for a blamed idiot!" Yellow Jim exclaimed.

"Oh, no!"

"W'ot do you suppose I would want to make a deal for when I have just bought the place?"

"Well, I didn't know anything about it, of course," the horseman replied, in an apologetic way. "But most men are always ready for a trade if they can make anything out of it."

"I ain't one of that kind!" the other replied, roughly. "And I want you to understand that I have got plenty of money too. I ain't running 'round making trades for the sake of ketching a dollar hyer and a dollar thar. I'll go you a hundred rocks that I hev got a heap sight more money than you kin put up!"

"That's right, Jim, nail him!" cried one of the others, and the third man clapped his hands and exclaimed:

"That is the talk! that is a dig under the fifth rib! Put up or shut up!"

"Well, Mr. Duffy, I am not traveling around boasting in regard to the amount of money I carry, but if you hav'n't got any more money than I have with me at the present moment, no road-agent would make much of a stake by holdin' you up," the Lone Hand replied.

"Wa-al, seeing as you were talking so loud 'bout buying plantations I thought I would see jest w'ot you were made of, but you hain't panned out worth shucks, ha, ha, ha!" and the ruffian laid back in his chair and laughed, contemptuously.

His companions followed his example, roaring out their ho, ho! as though they were enjoying the finest joke in the world.

"You are flush then just now I take it," the Lone Hand said, in his cool way.

"I reckon I am!" Yellow Jim answered.

"Got any gold?"

"A pocketful! hear the yellow boys rattle!" and as he spoke the ruffian clinked the gold-pieces together.

"Perhaps you can oblige me by changing a bill then?" the detective said. "I should like to get some gold eagles for a bill."

"Wa-al, I don't know 'bout that," the other observed, suspiciously, as if he didn't know what to make of the request.

"How big mought yer bill be?"

"A thousand-dollar note," and as he spoke the detective had his keen eyes fixed full on Yellow Jim's face.

But if he expected to catch the man unawares and see a start of surprise, he was disappointed, for Yellow Jim only stared like his companions.

"Give you gold for a thousand-dollar note?" he asked, in amazement.

"Oh, no, I was only joking; fifty dollars I mean, five eagles," the detective replied, carelessly.

The ruffian struck his head in an angry way.

"See hyer, stranger, I don't understand any joking of this kind, and it is my opinion that you hev got altogether too much lip."

"Yes, yes!" chorused the others.

"And you had better git out of hyer jest as soon as yer hoss's legs will carry ye!"

"Yes, you better dust," added one of the

others, and the third man, like a parrot, repeated:

"Better dust!"

"How about the five eagles?"

"Nary time! You had better travel right along and attend to yer business."

"I reckon you are only bluffing, after all!" the Lone Hand exclaimed, as he tightened the reins in his hand. "I don't believe you have got any gold!"

"Oh, I hain't, hey!" roared the other, in a passion.

"No, you can't show it."

"Can't I, hey! W'ot do you call this?" and Yellow Jim drew a handful of gold from his pocket and slapped the coins down on the table.

"Well, you are flush after all! If I had bet on your being broke you would have skinned me! So-long! I'll see you again, some time!"

And the Lone Hand galloped off, leaving Yellow Jim and his companions considerably enraged and decidedly amazed.

"No time must be lost now!" the detective declared, as he rode straight for Caddoville. "I must have a search-warrant out as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LONE HAND'S PLAN.

ON the way to Caddoville, when the Lone Hand came to Doctor Kingsland's plantation, he made a detour by way of the stables so as to exchange a word with the disguised actor.

Circumstances favored the detective. There wasn't any one around, so the two were able to speak freely.

"I have seen Yellow Jim."

"And what make you of him, me noble lord?" the tragedian asked.

"I think he is my mutton, and I am now going to ride straight to Caddoville and get out a warrant for his arrest."

"Aba!" exclaimed the actor, rubbing his hands gleefully together, "that looks like business!"

"The fellow's plantation is a lonely one, and so situated that it will be a difficult matter to get at him in the daytime, if he is at all suspicious of danger. There is a big swamp in the rear and if he once succeeds in getting into that swamp it would be very probable he would be able to bid defiance to all the officers in the State."

"Yes, yes, but he must not be allowed to work that little game," the tragedian remarked. "He must be surprised, and salt must be put on the tail of this frisky bird before he can get a chance to use his wings."

"That is my idea, and I propose to make the arrest after nightfall, when he will not be able to keep so good an outlook."

"Exactly, that is the way to do the trick. Under cover of the darkness his castle will be stormed."

"Yes, and, as far as I can see, he does not seem in the least apprehensive of danger," the Lone Hand remarked, thoughtfully. "It may be, he has covered up his tracks so carefully that he does not think the crimes can be brought home to him."

"That is the calculation that all these smart rascals make, but they sometimes slip up in a perfectly absurd fashion. The best laid plans of mice and men gang oft aglee!" spouted the tragedian.

"Now, I desire you to be on hand when this arrest is made. You have seen him when in his disguise and I want you to see if you can recognize him."

"I think I can spot his royal nibs, for I took particular pains to watch him when he was laying down the law to me, and although he was carefully disguised and went to considerable trouble to alter his voice yet as I am a pretty old stager at that sort of thing myself, I think I can nail him."

"I shall time it so as to make the arrest about half-past eight. You can conceal yourself by the road in the neighborhood of the house, and when you see us ride by, follow on after the party."

"High and mighty satrap! you can depend upon your faithful slave to execute your command to the very letter!"

"All right; the main point is for you to try and identify the man," the detective remarked, gathering up his reins.

"I think I can do it if I get any show for my money!" the actor replied, confidently.

"Do the best you can, and be sure to be on the ground in time."

"Never you fear! I will be there, stanch and true!" the tragedian cried.

Away rode the Lone Hand then for Caddoville.

"Let me see! who had I better consult in regard to this matter?" he mused as he rode into the town.

"Judge Waldron, I should say; the judge struck me as being a particularly good man, and I think he will be the fellow for me. The affair must be managed secretly, for my game may have confederates in the town for aught I know, and if the alarm is once given that the officers

are after him, and he has an opportunity to get into the swamp, the odds are big that there could hardly be a force large enough raised in the district to catch him."

Acting on this idea, the Lone Hand proceeded to Judge Waldron's office.

Dismounting, he entered, and was surprised to find that a carnival was being held in the apartment.

Besides the old lawyer there was MacMurphy and the mayor present.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, I fear I am intruding," the detective said.

"Not at all; sit down and make yourself at home!" exclaimed the judge, bringing a chair for the new-comer.

The Lone Hand accepted the proffered seat, and then, glancing at the three, said:

"Gentlemen, I regret that I have been obliged to play a little game of deception since coming to Caddoville, but I judged it was for the best and so I did it."

"Hang me if I didn't think so!" exclaimed Judge Waldron. "And I have been of that opinion right from the beginning. Gentlemen, you will all bear witness I told you that this Lone Hand was much more like a detective than that swaggering humbug whose principal business, after he struck the town, consisted of drinking all the whisky he could get hold of, particularly at other people's expense."

The rest nodded.

"You are really the detective?" the judge continued.

"I am, but when Mr. MacMurphy addressed me in such a public place, I judged that it would be wise for me to deny the truth, because, gentlemen, my way of working is to keep in the background until I have woven a network of proof around my man sufficient to convict him."

"Exactly; that was my idea!" the lawyer declared. "But I didn't say much, though, for I respected your desire to keep your identity a secret, although I could not resist the temptation of saying to these gentlemen that you were a deal more like what I should imagine a skilled and successful detective to be than the other chap."

The Lone Hand bowed in response to the compliment.

"Yes, I am aware now that I made a donkey of myself," the senator observed, "and all I can plead in excuse is, that, old and experienced man of business as I am, I never had anything to do with detectives before."

"You will know better next time," the judge remarked.

"Yes, I think I shall," and the senator made a grimace.

"By your appearance, and your acknowledgment that you are the detective, I presume you have secured a clew to the scoundrel who has preyed upon our citizens?" the mayor remarked.

"Yes, I think I have."

"By the way, one question, to satisfy my mind!" the judge exclaimed. "This fellow who swaggered so around town, is he a detective, really?"

"No, only a party that I hired to personate me, so as to throw the citizens here on a false scent."

"Exactly; I see. My judgment was not at fault, then. And now to come to the business in hand; you have a clew to this Bad Man of the Big Bayou?"

"Yes, and I want to get out a warrant for his arrest, also a search-warrant so I can turn a certain house upside down, in order to find the plunder."

MacMurphy became so excited that it was not possible for him to remain quietly seated in his chair.

He jumped to his feet.

"My heavens! is it possible that you really have succeeded in getting a clew to the scoundrel in this short time? Why, it is really wonderful!"

"Do not build too much on my action," the Lone Hand continued. "I am not proceeding on absolutely sure ground—I am not certain that I have got the right man, but the evidence I have secured seems to point at him, and so I am going on suspicion."

"Who is the party?" the judge asked.

"Yellow Jim Duffy."

The three looked at each other—MacMurphy, as much as to ask what the others thought about the matter, for being a stranger, he knew nothing of the man.

That the lawyer and the mayor, both well acquainted with Yellow Jim, were puzzled, it was plain.

"Well, I should hardly think Yellow Jim had the sand to work these jobs," Judge Waldron remarked, slowly.

"He might be a confederate, but I should not take him to be the principal," the mayor observed. "Then too, he has been away."

"No," then the Lone Hand told the story he had got from Baldy Smith, but did not give the source of his information.

This rather made the others open their eyes, and then the detective explained in regard to the gold which Yellow Jim possessed.

The judge added a word to this, for he had heard that Duffy had returned extremely flush.

"I want to execute the warrants to-night," the Lone Hand said, and then he explained how Yellow Jim was situated.

"Yes, he is inclined to be rather a desperate cuss," the judge said. "And, if he gets a chance undoubtedly would make a fight, that is if he thought there was any show for him to win."

"My idea is to jump on him in such a way that he will not get a chance to make any resistance at all," the detective explained.

"That is the way to do it," the mayor remarked.

"Well, gentlemen, do you care to go with the party?"

"Most certainly!" MacMurphy declared. "I will go for one, and if this fellow is the man who robbed me, I should like to have him offer resistance so I would have a chance to get a few good cracks at him!"

"I'll go too," the lawyer remarked, laughing at the heat of the senator.

"And I also," said the mayor.

"We are likely to find two men with Yellow Jim, but as there are four of us, with a couple more we ought to be able to attend to them."

The others agreed to this and the mayor suggested that the marshal, Tom Burleson, and his deputy, would do.

"Yes, give them warning that you will want them to go with you on some business to-night, Mr. Mayor, but be careful not to drop a word to allow them to suspect the nature of the business," the Lone Hand warned.

The mayor promised to use due caution, and it was managed that the party should leave Caddoville in detachments, so as not to excite suspicion. The judge, the marshal and MacMurphy were to rendezvous at a point just beyond Doctor Kingsland's plantation; the mayor, the deputy-marshal and Lone Hand were to join them, and then all go on together. So carefully were the arrangements made that it seemed certain the surprise would be a success.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SURPRISE.

ALL went well: the six men met as per agreement and all were sure that no suspicion had been excited.

And after the meeting the six proceeded along the roads in detachments, a good half mile between the parties, so that no chance wayfarer, who might be encountered, would suspect that a man-hunt was on foot.

Not until the party was within a half a mile of Yellow Jim's plantation did they come together.

By this time it was completely dark, but the moon was coming up, so the horsemen had light enough to enable them to see where they were going.

At a quarter of a mile from the house the party dismounted and prepared to approach on foot, fearing lest the sound of the hoof-beats of so many horses might alarm the man they sought.

As the party came together, after dismounting, a dark form rose from ambush in a clump of bushes near at hand.

In alarm all drew their "guns," excepting the Lone Hand.

"It is all right, gentlemen," he explained, "this is my man."

"There's three of 'em in the house and the door is guarded by a heavy bar, for I heard them put it up after the nigs started for their quarters," the tragedian said, for the new-comer was the actor, still in his tramp disguise.

"Hadn't I better try a little game to get them to open the door? Then, when the portal is ajar, you can make a rush and take the castle by storm."

All the party at once saw the merit of the plan, for unless the men within could be induced to open the door it would be no easy task to gain admittance, and so it was arranged that the game should be worked in that way.

As noiselessly as so many specters the posse glided toward the mansion.

From within came the sounds of revelry, for Yellow Jim and his companions were playing cards and indulging freely in liquor.

After the attackers were in position, the tragedian marched up to the door and rapped loudly upon it.

"Hello! who's there?" cried the voice of Yellow Jim.

"Hi'm an unfortunate cove vot 'as lost me vay," the actor replied. "Hi 'av a letter 'ere for Mr. Duffy, but I'm hoff the road, and I can't find 'is 'ouse nowhere. Would you be so kind has to tell me the road to Mr. Duffy's 'ouse —Mr. Jim Duffy?"

"I reckon all you have to do is to foller yer nose, old man!" cried the hoarse voice of the ruffian, and then he could be heard getting up and approaching the door.

There was the sound of the bar being removed, and then the door was opened.

Yellow Jim had not the slightest suspicion that any evil was intended. He expected a letter about some stock and so fell readily into the trap.

The tragedian had got out of the way, and

the six men were ready to make a charge when the door opened.

The Lone Hand was at the head of the party, his trusty six-shooter in his hand; behind him came Burleson, the marshal, and his deputy, and the others brought up the rear, each and every man with a drawn revolver.

The moment the door was opened and the face of Yellow Jim appeared in the entrance, the Lone Hand poked his cocked revolver right under his nose and cried out:

"Throw up your hands or you are a dead man!"

Yellow Jim started back, overwhelmed with amazement, the Lone Hand promptly followed him up, and the rest rushed in behind.

The two men at the table, upon beholding this invasion, made a dive for their weapons but the intruders had them already covered and the marshal cried, sternly:

"If you pull any guns, gents, you'll get the hull tops of yer heads blown off!"

The quickness with which the pair took their hands away from their revolvers, after receiving this warning was marvelous.

"W'ot in blazes does this hyer mean?" roared Yellow Jim in astonishment.

"That you are my prisoner!" responded the Lone Hand, snapping a pair of handcuffs upon Yellow Jim's wrists so deftly that the man was a prisoner almost before he knew it.

"Hello! you cussed snake!" cried Duffy, suddenly recognizing the detective. "I had an idee to-day that you was up to some mischief, sneaking round hyar!"

The actor had entered the room immediately after the capture, and he was listening eagerly to every word that Yellow Jim uttered.

MacMurphy too was decidedly interested in the captive desperado.

Both men were intent on the same purpose; they were trying to see if they could recognize in Yellow Jim the masked marauder.

The marshal and deputy had also handcuffed and disarmed the two men, for it was the Lone Hand's game to arrest all within the house.

If the pair knew aught of Duffy's maraudering business they might be induced to turn state evidence in order to save themselves.

By this extremely simple game many a desperate gang of ruffians have been brought to justice.

"Yes, Mister Yellow Jim Duffy, I reckon I have got you where the hair is short!" the detective remarked.

"W'ot do you mean? I ain't done nothing!"

"When we prove that you are the fellow who has been frightening all the people in Caddo parish with monkey tricks as the Bad Man of the Big Bayou, I reckon you will squeal."

A look of profound astonishment appeared on Yellow Jim's face, and the expression of amazement too that appeared on the countenances of Yellow Jim's companions would seem to say that they knew nothing of this matter, unless indeed they were wonderfully good actors.

"Oh, bosh! ye'r' clean off yer nut!" the ruffian exclaimed in contempt. "I am not the man at ail! I have done my share of deviltry in my time, I reckon, but you are barking up the wrong tree when you try to fix the Bad Man business on me."

"Then you are not willing to own up?" the detective said.

"Nary time! I ain't a-going to own up to what ain't so!" Yellow Jim responded, sullenly.

"I reckon we will have to search your premises here and see what we can find," the Lone Hand remarked.

Yellow Jim swore at a dreadful rate, and threatened all sorts of vengeance, but his captors proceeded with the search without paying the least attention to him.

The detective seemed to have the scent of a hound, for in a secret nook in a part of the massive stone chimney foundation, made by removing one of the stones and putting in its place a smaller one, so there was a hiding room behind it, a leather travelling-bag, about eighteen inches long by twelve inches wide was discovered.

The ruffian went almost crazy when the bag was produced.

"That's mine—don't you dare to open it!" he yelled.

"It was locked, but the Lone Hand found a key in Yellow Jim's pocket which opened it.

Within the bag was nearly a thousand dollars in golden eagles.

"Aha! Senator MacMurphy, this is some of the plunder that the fellow got from you!" the detective said.

"It is a lie! I made that gold down on the Rio Grande, in Mexico!" the desperado roared.

Then, with his bloodhound-like instinct, the Lone Hand discovered that there were some papers concealed in the lining of the bag.

To rip it open with his knife was but a moment's work, and then, in triumph, he drew forth five one-thousand-dollar bills!

"Do you see that, senator?" the Lone Hand

exclaimed. "There are some of the identical bills of which you were robbed."

"No doubt of it! I could swear to them!" MacMurphy cried, as he took them into his hands.

Yellow Jim's under-jaw dropped when the bills were produced, and he looked at the money as though he could hardly believe that he saw aright.

"As Heaven is my judge, strangers, I sw'ar to you I had no more idee that them 'ar bills was hid in that 'ar sachel than a child unborn!" Yellow Jim declared. "I knew the gold was thar, 'cos that was mine, but I didn't have any more idee that them bills were thar than any of you men had afore they were hauled out."

"You can get your lawyer to tell that to the jury," Judge Waldron remarked. "Maybe they will believe the story, but we don't."

By every oath that he could think of, Yellow Jim swore he knew nothing about the paper money, and stuck steadfast to his story that he got the gold down on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande.

The three were carried off to the calaboose in Caddoville, and within an hour the town was wild with excitement, for the news soon spread that Yellow Jim Duffy had been arrested, charged with being the Bad Man of the Big Bayou, and few people were there in the town who were not fully satisfied that he was guilty.

And yet, two men, who, of all in the town, were best qualified to judge of the matter, went to the Lone Hand and expressed their belief that the ruffian was not the man who had played the part of the mysterious masked marauder.

These two were Senator MacMurphy and the tragedian.

MacMurphy was very uncertain about the matter.

"I don't hardly think this man is the one who robbed me," he said. "The fellow seemed to be fully a head taller than this man."

Yellow Jim was short and thick-set.

"Still, under the circumstances, I could not judge accurately; yet, it seems to me this is not the man."

The actor was positive.

"No, me royal nibs, this is not the fakir who did the trick!" he declared. "This bandy-legged, slab-sided galoot has neither the skill nor the dash to do the job. An accomplice he may be, I grant you, but he is not the principal. I would know the voice though it was disguised, for my ear has been well-trained, and this croaking raven don't fill the bill at all."

"Well, we may see, when it comes to trial," the Lone Hand replied in his quiet way, but he did not dispute the soundness of the judgments.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DETECTIVE PLAYS DEEP A GAME.

For a week had Yellow Jim lain in jail, and, by the mayor's orders no one was allowed to see him, nor his companions, and although some lawyers, who were anxious to get the job of defending the three growled terribly at the injustice of this, yet the mayor was resolute.

"They will not be tried here, gentlemen, and after I give them up to the sheriff you can undoubtedly have all the interviews you like, but not now."

The purpose of this was to keep it from getting out that the Lone Hand had been instrumental in the capture.

He desired still to masquerade as the planter, and still remained a guest at the Kingsland mansion.

On the seventh night that Yellow Jim lay in the calaboose he had a visitor, the first who had entered his cell, and that visitor was the detective.

"Oh, it is you, is it, you infernal bloodhound?" the ruffian cried, as the Lone Hand placed his lantern upon the floor and took a seat upon the stool by the door, the prisoner being stretched upon his bunk.

"Yes, I have come to bid you good-by."

"Oh, you're going away?"

"No, you are going; the sheriff is coming for you to-morrow."

"That is good!" the prisoner cried. "I am mighty glad of it! My trial will soon take place then, and people will see that I am an innocent man."

"Yes, I am going on a long journey," the Lone Hand said with a peculiar intonation.

The ruffian was not usually keen witted but captivity had made him somewhat sharper.

"W'ot the blazes do you mean?" he growled sitting upright on the bed. "You are playing some game on me! I know you are! The sheriff ain't a-going to take me on no long journey."

"It is a long journey and yet it isn't," the detective remarked in a reflective way. "It is but a single step from this world to eternity."

"Eh, w'ot's that? Do you mean to say that I am going to die?"

"Well, I don't know as I ought to have said anything to you about it, yet it didn't seem quite right to allow you to be taken by surprise."

"Will you stop yer blamed foolishness an' tell me w'ot you mean?" Yellow Jim cried, nervously.

"Are you ready to die?"

"No, I ain't, and I am not going to die, either," the other exclaimed, angrily. "What do you want to come hyer for, trying to scare a feller in this way?"

"Jim Duffy, you haven't got much over an hour of life left! and if you have anything that you want to attend to, you had better prepare."

"What do you mean?" the captor gasped.

"The citizens of Caddoville don't intend that the sheriff shall take you away; they think you are a guilty man and they intend to lynch you to-night."

"Great Heaven!" cried the man in an agony of terror.

"Their idea is to string you up and force a confession out of you, but as you say you have nothing to confess, your death is certain, for the crowd will not believe you, and if you will not confess they will surely hang you."

Yellow Jim turned ghastly pale and, tumbling from the bed, knelt at the feet of the detective.

"In the name of Heaven, man, can't you save me?" he pleaded. "I tell you I cannot own up that I am the man who committed these robberies, for I didn't do 'em!"

"Can't you tell when a man speaks the truth?"

"Well, it certainly seems as if you were acting honest."

"I am, as I am a living man, I am honest. I'm telling the truth. I'll tell you all about it, if you will only save me from the lynchers."

"I don't know as I can, but if you tell a good, straightforward story, maybe I can get them to believe it."

"You shall have the bull thing," Yellow Jim exclaimed, nervous with fear. "I will tell it to you as straight as a string," and he rose as he spoke and tottered back to the bed.

"Go ahead! If your story seems reasonable, I think I can save you."

"Oh, try, for Heaven's sake try, for I'm a guilty sinner and I ain't fit to die! but I swear to you, jest as if I was standing on the brink of the grave, that I never had anything to do with this Bad Man business."

"Spin your yarn, and be quick, for there's no time to be lost."

"I will. I will! First and foremost that Mexico business is a lie. I ain't been out of Caddo. I had trouble with that crazy Foxy John, and I took to the woods for fear of him; when he died I came out. I had a hut on the edge of the Big White Swamp; when I came back to that hut, after being in hiding, I found that some one had been using it. The dirt in one corner of the hut was disturbed as though something was buried there; I dug and found the sachel with the gold."

"I reckoned, of course, that it was somebody's plunder, but as I hadn't robbed anybody I made up my mind to keep it, and that is the true truth, so help me Heaven! But I begin to see it now; the sachel was put there to trap me, so I would be ketched and hung for the Bad Man while he gits off."

"It looks like it," the Lone Hand remarked. "I believe you have told me the truth, and I'll do all I can to save you."

The detective departed. Yellow Jim waited anxiously, but the lynchers came not.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. SIFTING THE EVIDENCE.

FOUR earnest men were waiting for the Lone Hand's report.

They were in the outer apartment of the calaboose, in company with the marshal and his deputy, one of whom kept a constant watch upon the prisoner.

Yellow Jim was known to be a desperate fellow, and to have desperate friends, who might take big chances to free him from his ugly situation.

The four men were Senator MacMurphy, Judge Waldron, De Grandville, the mayor, and the banker, Philip Van Orden, who had come in hot haste from Jonesville when intelligence reached him that the Bad Man had been caught.

Of course, as the reader has doubtless guessed, the lynchers existed only in the vivid imagination of the acute detective.

The story was simply one of those ingenious devices so often used successfully by veteran thief-catchers to terrify a prisoner into a confession.

The marshal was in the plot and the four friends were at the jail ready to play the role of lynchers, clamorous for the blood of the captive, if he was not inclined to confess.

As the reader knows, however, it was not necessary to go to this extreme.

Yellow Jim had weakened right in the beginning.

When the Lone Hand entered the office of the calaboose after his interview with the prisoner, all looked at him anxiously.

The detective shook his head.

"Couldn't succeed in getting much out of him, gentlemen," he said. "He still persists in his denial."

"He is one of the stubborn kind," the marshal remarked. "But when he finds how strong the evidence is ag'in' him, I reckon he will come then."

Since Yellow Jim's arrest some very strong evidence indeed, in the opinion of the public, had been found.

Two of the men who had been robbed by the Bad Man of the Big Bayou, Uncle Sammy Bullet, and Big Ben Folsom, had declared there wasn't any doubt in their minds that Yellow Jim Duffy was the man who had robbed them; in fact, both went so far as to say they had suspected Yellow Jim was the man right from the beginning, although by some unaccountable mischance they had neglected to mention the fact to any one.

As we remarked a while ago, the adage of "Give a dog a bad name, and hang him," fitted Duffy's case extremely well.

He had been accused and quite a number were ready to swear he was the man, without regard to the evidence in the case.

From the detective's manner the friends judged that he did not want to go into particulars in the presence of the marshal and his deputy, therefore Judge Waldron suggested that they come down to his office, and have a talk about the business, so the four went, accompanied by the detective.

There in the privacy of the judge's office, the Lone Hand repeated the confession which Yellow Jim had made.

When the recital was completed, the friends looked at each other, an expression of doubt upon every face.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you think of it?" the judge asked.

"Judge, you are the best man to answer the question," Senator MacMurphy declared. "You are a lawyer used to sifting evidence."

The rest agreed to this.

"Upon my word, gentlemen," the judge remarked after reflecting over the matter for a few moments, "I think the man has told the truth. He is the victim of a skillfully devised plot. The real criminal fixed a trap so that Yellow Jim would be caught."

The three friends agreed that this was correct and the Lone Hand was asked what he thought about the matter.

"I agree with you, gentlemen," he replied. "Yellow Jim has told the truth; he is not the man who committed the robberies, nor even an accomplice, although from the fact of the money being found in his possession, and that Bullet and Folsom are ready to swear he is the man who robbed them, the chances are big that he will be convicted, unless the real robber is caught in the mean time."

"Their declaration is ridiculous!" the old lawyer declared. "They haven't even seen Duffy since his capture, and yet they swear they can identify him."

"Well, I am ready to swear he is not the man who got away with my wealth!" MacMurphy declared. "The thief was taller and more slender; besides, he played the game in a way that this miserable low-down cuss could never hope to do."

"You are right, gentlemen, he is not the man!" the Lone Hand declared. "But it is just as well for us to keep quiet in regard to our doubts, for the real criminal, thinking that the accusing of Yellow Jim insures his safety, may make some uncautious move and so give me a chance to trap him."

"You have a suspicion then in regard to the right party?" the judge asked.

"Yes, but I will not mention who I suspect until I secure proofs, and, gentlemen, I am afraid it will take a long time."

This declaration ended the discussion.

CHAPTER XXXIX. RUN TO EARTH.

ANOTHER week went by. Yellow Jim had had his preliminary examination, and had been held for trial, the amount of bail being fixed at so high a figure that none of his friends were able to raise the sum.

The principal evidence produced was the testimony of Uncle Sammy Bullet and Big Ben Folsom, both of whom swore positively that Yellow Jim Duffy was the masked robber, and the men really believed it, too, so apt is the human mind to be swayed by outward circumstances.

Acting under the advice of the Lone Hand, MacMurphy also made his evidence as strong as possible against the prisoner, and so, when the examination ended, so strong was the presumption of Duffy's guilt, that the betting sharps were offering to lay five to one in hundreds that Yellow Jim would be convicted, and the wagers found no takers.

It was the detective's design to throw the actual robber off his guard by making it appear that Yellow Jim would surely be found guilty. It was he who started the betting men, and the cards were worked so well that even the lawyers, who had been retained to defend Duffy, regarded his case as a hopeless one, and advised him to secure a light sentence by confessing and giving up the plunder; they regarded Yellow Jim's story of how he came by the gold as being a lie from beginning to end.

No wonder the unfortunate scoundrel was on the border of despair.

During all this time the Lone Hand still sojourned at Doctor Kingsland's.

Two or three times he had told the doctor that he was afraid he was trespassing upon his kindness, but Kingsland would not bear of his going, particularly after Duffy's examination, when it was revealed that he was the celebrated detective.

"I knew there was something remarkable about you!" he declared to the man-hunter. "You impressed me in that way the first time I met you, and that was the reason I was glad to entertain you as my guest. You must remain, my dear sir, until this rascal is tried and convicted, as he is sure to be, and then Caddo parish will be rid of one of the most dangerous scoundrels that has ever found a refuge within its borders."

Naturally, under the circumstances, the detective remained.

The tragedian, still in his disguise of the English tramp, hung around the stables and there were frequent conferences between the actor and the detective when occasion served.

Yellow Jim's trial came at last.

All the people for miles around were there, for it was the greatest trial which had ever taken place in the district.

The case went as everybody believed it would go, beforehand.

Yellow Jim was convicted by the jury without their leaving their seats, and the judge, in a very able speech, as all agreed, said that it gave him pleasure to pronounce judgment upon so great a rascal, and he would make the punishment so heavy that he "reckoned" it would be a long time before any one tried a similar game on the Caddo.

The sentence was twenty years at hard labor.

Yellow Jim fairly foamed at the mouth; he cursed the Judge, he cursed the jury, the witnesses who had sworn his liberty away, vowed that when he came out he would kill every one of them, and was carried from the court-room by main force, fighting like a madman.

Served him right was the general verdict.

But none of the men who had been plundered were satisfied, for although the Bad Man was safely caged at last, none of the plunder was recovered with the exception of that captured in the beginning.

Doctor Kingsland gave a grand dinner in honor of the Lone Hand, after the trial, and secured from him a promise that he would remain as his guest one week longer.

After the dinner ended—it was served in the Kingsland mansion, in a style which made the guests open their eyes—and the company departed—everybody for thirty miles around, who was anybody, was there—the doctor, who had drunk heavily during the banquet insisted upon the detective taking a "night-cap" with him before retiring to rest.

The dinner lasted from seven in the evening until nearly eleven.

Kingsland would not take no for an answer and produced a bottle of brandy.

"Twenty dollars a gallon, my boy, where it is made on the hills of Cognac; the kind the Russian princes drink."

The Lone Hand took a small quantity of the really superb liquor, but the doctor filled his glass to the brim.

"I will give you a toast, my dear sir: May you have as much success in your next enterprise as you have achieved in this!"

The toast was duly drank, and then the pair separated, each going to his room.

When he was in the solitude of his chamber the Lone Hand did not undress and retire to rest, but seated himself in an easy-chair and gave way to thought.

That he was perplexed was evident by the way in which he shook his head every now and then, and finally after a good hour of meditation he began to talk to himself after his old fashion.

"The most difficult case I ever handled!" he murmured. "In my own mind I am convinced; the actor, who is a shrewd fellow in his way, despite his eccentricities, is also of my opinion, but there is absolutely no proof—not one hundredth part as much as the flimsy thread which has sent Yellow Jim to the State Prison, a perfectly innocent man."

"I am groping in the dark. How—where can I get a clew which will lead me to something tangible?"

The Lone Hand sat facing the closet, of which we have spoken before—the door was open so that the detective had a full view of the interior.

Judge of his astonishment when a secret door in the back of the closet opened, and Doctor Kingsland, clad in his odd night-clothes, jacket and pantaloons, in the style of India, made his appearance.

Straight through the closet and into the room came the doctor, not taking the least notice of the detective. He took a rocking-chair by the bureau and sat down.

His eyes were open, but there was a strange unearthly look in them, and he did not seem to be conscious that there was anybody in the room but himself.

The truth flashed suddenly upon the Lone

Hand; Doctor Kingsland was a somnambulist and was walking in his sleep.

"The hand of Heaven is in this!" the detective muttered.

"Well, I think the long agony is over, and I may rest in peace," the doctor muttered in clearly audible tones.

"Yellow Jim Duffy is convicted, the Bad Man is caught, and the dwellers on the Caddo can breathe in peace.

"And this detective, who has bounded an innocent man to a dungeon cell, will go away pluming himself upon his skill. Bah! what a hollow mockery is this world!

"But I am keen-sighted. This bloodhound never deceived me. I saw that he was dangerous from the first, and that was why I invited him to my house.

"It was my intention, if I found that he was at all hot on the trail, to kill him—kill him quietly, and in so scientific a manner that all would think his death due to natural causes.

"He blundered, though, and so I spared him. The trap that I laid for Yellow Jim caught him and deceived all the world.

"I am safe. In three months I will be in Europe. All of Pearl's fortune is gone, with the exception of the small amount of securities which I did not dare to negotiate. Her wealth followed mine, but with the money I now have I will be more prudent. I will go to Persia or some of those semi-barbarous countries and live in Oriental luxury.

"But my money—is it safe?"

He tapped his forehead with his hand, rose and retreated through the closet; the Lone Hand followed with noiseless steps.

The closet led into the doctor's apartment. There was no carpet on the floor, only a large rug covered the center of the room.

Kingsland pulled the rug to one side, then opened a narrow trap-door in the floor, so snugly contrived that the keenest eyes could not have discovered its existence.

Beneath the trap was a beam, its center all hollowed out, and in this odd hiding-place was the plunder which the doctor, or the night marauder, had wrested from his victims.

Kingsland gloated over the treasure for a few moments.

"All safe—all safe! and I am rich again!"

Then, moving backward, he struck and overturned a small table upon which was a pitcher and glass.

Crash went the two articles to the floor.

The doctor awoke with a start.

His eyes fell upon the detective and upon the open trap.

"Bloodhound, die!" he cried, immediately comprehending that he was at last hunted down.

He flashed forth a small derringer. The Lone Hand closed in upon him; there was a brief struggle—the pistol was discharged and the detective, forcing the muzzle away from him, caused the ball to enter under the doctor's chin, from whence it went straight up into his brain, killing the man instantly.

Kingsland sunk to the floor and the Lone Hand looked on for a moment in horror. Nothing was more foreign to his design than to kill his assailant. All he desired to do was to disarm him.

He listened, expecting an immediate alarm, but all within the mansion slept too soundly to be awakened by the single shot.

The detective shut the trap and replaced the rug, then he hurried to the stables and awakened the actor sleeping there.

The tragedian had studied the doctor's voice and declared that it was identical with the tone of the masked robber, so he was not surprised at the disclosure.

Judge Waldron and the rest were summoned. They came in haste, and great was their wonder; but as no good end was to be secured by a public exposure the affair was hushed up.

It was given out that the doctor committed suicide.

The money was given back to its rightful owners, but with the exception of the senator none of them knew how it was recovered.

The facts of the case were laid before the governor and a parlon for Yellow Jim secured.

The official explained his action by saying that recently discovered evidence made it plain that Duffy was innocent.

Yellow Jim had a lesson though which made him a different man; he emigrated to Texas and led an honest life.

In due time, Pearl and Tom Sumpter were married, and the loss of the greater part of the young heiress's fortune troubled neither of them.

The actor received five thousand dollars for his work and immediately started for New York to put a company on the "road," intending as he declared, "to make Rome howl!"

And as for the hero of our tale you shall have more of him anon, gentle reader, for in the wild southwest he met with many adventures even more strange than his experiences on the Caddo.

THE END.

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